

NINE
DISCOURSES
ON
PRAYER.

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BY

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Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit; and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

EPH. VI. 18.

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THE Author of the following Discourses, by way of preface to this Second Edition, has only to express his gratitude to God for the favourable reception which the First Edition has found in the Christian world, and also his sincere thanks to those friends, through whose partiality and zeal the rapidity of its sale was greatly promoted.

JAMAICA ROW;
July 5, 1799.

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SER-

S E R M O N I.

THE OBJECT AND NATURE OF TRUE PRAYER.

MATTHEW, xxi. 22.

And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

THE religion of Jesus Christ, taken as a whole, is the most perfect and gracious design that ever was formed in the infinite mind of God, and the richest gift that he could possibly bestow upon intelligent and fallen creatures, such as the children of men. If it be recollected that Christianity is a revelation of the boundless love of Christ, in undertaking and accomplishing the redemption of his church from sin and misery, and raising it to a state of perfect holiness and happiness in heaven, then it must be confessed, that the minutest branches of it ought not to be deemed trifling or unimportant. There are, however, some parts of divine truth which are

more interesting than others, at least they occupy more prominent stations: among these may very properly be reckoned, the unspeakable privilege of access to God at a throne of grace.

It was a pleasing and encouraging vision with which Jacob was favoured at Bethel, when, on his way to Padan-aram, " he dreamed, and " behold, a ladder set upon the earth, and the top " of it reached to heaven ; and behold, the angels " of God ascending and descending on it." Gen. xxviii. 12. But in the New Testament scriptures we have a real discovery of that, of which the ladder Jacob saw could at most be only a figure. There we discover a medium of intercourse between heaven and earth, by which not only the angels ascend and descend, but we discover " a " new and living way," by which God himself comes down to us, and we ascend to him. He who possesses a genuine spirit of prayer, is carried by it far above this lower world ; he is borne by it up to the courts of paradise, and is privileged to lay open all his wants, his afflictions, and his temptations, at the very footstool of the throne of God ; and that too with a well-grounded confidence, that he who said to Moses, " I have surely seen the affliction of my people " which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry, " by reason of their task-masters, for I know their " sorrows, and I am come down to deliver them,"

Exod.

Exod. iii. 7, 8. will also hear his supplications, and appear for him in every time of need.

Prayer is not only a very important part of religion, as it is the instrument of our converse with Heaven, but also because it is one of the principal means of keeping the Christian alive to God, and both strengthens the principle, and enlarges the exercise of his grace. Those sparks of heavenly life, which God hath kindled in the Christian's bosom, are frequently so feeble, that they seem as if they would expire every moment, at least, that the slightest storm of affliction and temptation must inevitably extinguish them : but no, they are fed and nourished by prayer and supplication, which ultimately, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, fans them into a bright and vigorous flame, which neither earth nor hell shall be able to destroy.

The great and extensive influence of prayer upon all our graces, and the general state of our experience in the Christian life, is obvious by the manner in which the apostle Paul recommends it to one of the primitive churches. After shewing them the enemies with whom they have to contend, directing them to " be strong in the " Lord, and in the power of his might," and describing the " armour of God," as including the girdle of truth, the breast-plate of righteousness, the shoes of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit,

he adds, " Praying always with all prayer and
 " supplication in the Spirit, and watching there-
 " unto with all perseverance and supplications for
 " all saints." Eph. vi. 10—18.

Prayer is not only an important, but it is also a very large and comprehensive subject, and, in one form or another, meets the eye of him who converses much with his Bible, more frequently than any other part of religion. I shall not, however, discuss it upon the largest scale possible, but, in a few discourses, select from the scriptures the most prominent branches thereof. In this first discourse I shall claim your attention to,

First, The object of prayer. Secondly, The nature of it. Thirdly, The obligations we are under to pray. Fourthly, The great importance of faith in this holy exercise.

First, The object of prayer. It is an unspeakable mercy to us, that we are not left, in our inquiries upon this point, to the dim light of natural reason, like the poor heathen; we speak not merely of such heathens only as are destitute of the advantages of science and the blessings of civilized life: the remark I have made applies to the best days of Rome and Greece. Previous to the introduction of Christianity into those far-famed republics, gods were innumerable, and all resembled the gods described by the Psalmist: " Their idols are silver and gold, the work of
 " men's hands; they have mouths, but they
 " speak

“ speak not ; eyes have they, but they see not ;
 “ they have ears, but they hear not ; noses have
 “ they, but they smell not ; they have hands, but
 “ they handle not,” &c. Psa. cxv. 4—8. The
 volume of nature in which is written Jehovah’s
 “ eternal power and Godhead,” Rom. i. 20. was
 open to inspection, and was much studied by
 the priests and philosophers of ancient times ; but
 they understood it not ; they still followed the
 vain imaginations of their darkened and carnal
 hearts, illustrating and confirming the testimony
 of the apostle, that, “ the world by wisdom
 “ knew not God.” 1 Cor. i. 21. But we are
 favoured with the holy scriptures, in which we
 have not only a revelation of the nature and per-
 fections of God, but also the most explicit di-
 rections concerning the manner in which he will
 be worshipped. It is there shewn by the great
 Prophet of the church, that “ God is a spirit,
 “ and they that worship him must worship him
 “ in spirit and in truth.” John, iv. 24. It is
 therefore of great importance, that we should
 have just and scriptural notions of the object of
 prayer, otherwise we may offer “ strange fire
 “ before the Lord,” as did Nadab and Abihu.
 Lev. x. 1, 2. That which is spoken of the word,
 Deut. iv. 2. may be accommodated to the object
 of prayer ; nothing is to be added thereunto, nei-
 ther is ought to be diminished.

The object of prayer set before us in the sacred volume, is the one living and true God, a God in Trinity, under the express denomination of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and of whom the church of Christ has long been accustomed to speak thus: "These three are one God, the same in substance, and equal in power and glory *." This is doubtless one of the most mysterious doctrines in revelation, and of course we offer you no explanation of it: to attempt to do this would only be to darken counsel "by words without knowledge." Job, xxxviii. 2. The credit of this doctrine has already too often suffered in the estimation of mankind by the imprudent zeal of some of its professed friends, in attempting to explain what is infinitely above the compass of human investigation. Whilst, however, we admit, that it is inexplicable by all the efforts of human reason, being among "the deep things of God," 1 Cor. ii. 10. yet of its truth and importance we are strongly convinced. We do not maintain this doctrine merely on the ground of its being found in detached passages of scripture; but we also maintain it, as being interwoven with the whole Christian system, in its doctrines, experience, and practice: it is, indeed, at the very foundation of the gospel; take this

* Assembly of Divines.

away, and the building of grace and truth falls to pieces. The God to whom we pray is the God from whom the church receives all its salvation; of this God, and of this salvation, the apostle Peter speaks thus: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. i. 2. In this scripture, equally strong in defence of the doctrine of the Trinity with 1 John, v. 7. (to destroy the authenticity of which, its adversaries have taken so much pains), we perceive three distinct agents spoken of, and expressly named; to each of them is ascribed some branch of salvation; to the Father's grace Christians owe their election; to the Son's obedience and death they owe their justification; and to the Spirit's power, their sanctification and holiness: each of these is highly important in the Christian religion, and they are affirmed separately and collectively to be entirely the work of that God to whom Christians pray.

The holy Trinity are sometimes addressed in prayer jointly, as when the apostle thus prays for the church at Corinth: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." 2 Cor. xiii. 14. Sometimes the Father and the Son only are prayed to, as in 2 Theff. ii. 16, 17. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ

“ himself, and God even our Father, which hath
 “ loved us, and hath given us everlasting con-
 “ solation, and good hope through grace, com-
 “ fort your hearts, and stablish you in every
 “ good word and work.” In various places
 in scripture, the Father, the Son, and the
 Holy Spirit, are prayed to separately ; but the
 most ordinary and proper mode to be adopted in
 prayer, is to address the Father, in the name and
 through the mediation of Jesus Christ, depending
 on the Spirit to help our infirmities ; “ for through
 “ him we both have access by one Spirit unto the
 “ Father.” Eph. ii. 18. He who thus prays to
 God, pays equal homage to each person in the
 holy Trinity, and honours Jesus Christ and the
 Holy Spirit as he honours the Father.

He that believes and asserts this doctrine, must
 be content to pass for a fool in the estimation of
 those who exalt their own reason above revela-
 tion, and who, though possessed of much human
 knowledge, shew much zeal and bitterness against
 the leading doctrines of grace, as well as against
 those who preach and publish them. To such
 persons we have only to say, “ that after the
 “ way which they call heresy, so worship we the
 “ God of our fathers,” Acts, xxiv. 14. ; and that
 we believe as firmly that our notions of God are
 right, as they do that theirs are so ; and upon
 much better ground, taking the Bible as it now
 stands, without any of the alterations and ima-
 ginary

ginary amendments which modern critics would fain introduce into it. We proceed to speak,

Secondly, Of the nature of prayer. There are few, if any, definitions of prayer more concise or scriptural than that of the Assembly of Divines in their Shorter Catechism: "Prayer is an offering up
" of our desires to God, for things agreeable to
" his will, in the name of Christ." I shall make this definition the ground of this head of discourse.

1. It is the offering up of our desires to God; it is the unfeigned language of the heart; and there is no true prayer, where there is only a repetition of words. There has been too much of this kind of lip-service in the church in every age: happy would it have been, if the Jews had been the only people against whom the Lord could justly make this complaint: "This people draweth
" nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth
" me with their lips, but their heart is far from
" me." Matt. xv. 8. To such persons God says,
" When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide
" mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many
" prayers, I will not hear." Isa. i. 15. Every real Christian knows experimentally the difference between the prayer of the lip and that of the heart. In his natural state, the Christian knew nothing of his guilt and misery, nor of the rich treasures of mercy and grace revealed in the gospel; but when the Holy Spirit discovers all this, convincing
of

of sin, and shewing the things of Christ, then the Christian begins to hunger and thirst after the bread and water of life ; he becomes an importunate suppliant, and cries to and wrestles with God, in a way which evinces he no longer prays in a formal and unfeeling manner, but like Jacob, who said, " I will not let thee go, except " thou blest me," Gen. xxxii. 26. and like the Syrophenician woman, who continued to cry, " Have mercy upon me, O Lord," and, " Lord " help me," until the Redeemer answered, " Be " it unto thee even as thou wilt." Matt. xv. 22. 25. 28.

2. It is essential to the nature of true prayer, that what we ask, should be according to the divine will. We are liable in our prayers to be governed more by a regard to our own ease, interest, and inclination, than by either a concern for the glory of God, or the prosperity of our own souls. This remark is exemplified too much in the conduct of good men in general, who are at times more earnest for the bestowment of temporal blessings, and the removal of temporal evils, than they are either for an increase of grace and holiness, or the manifestation of the glory of God, the proper ends to which all the Christian's prayers and exertions should be directed. Lot was governed by his inclination more than his judgment and conscience, both when he chose the plains of Sodom for his residence, though its inha-

inhabitants were so intolerably wicked, and when he desired Zoar for the place of his refuge, after the Lord had brought him out of that devoted country. Gen. xiii. 10. and chap. xix. 19, 20. Elijah's prayer was in conformity to the rule of which we are speaking, when he said, "O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." 1 Kings, xix. 4. The same spirit pervaded the language of that peevish and rebellious prophet who was commissioned to call Nineveh to repentance, when "he fainted and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live." Jonah, iv. 9. Both these instances furnish us with proof that even good men may pray in their own spirit, and have a greater regard to their own will than to that of their heavenly Father. How different the spirit and rule of their petitions, to that of the apostle, who, when he requested his dismissal out of time, was not influenced by impatience to get rid of the cross, but rather by a wish to obtain the vision and enjoyment of the dear Redeemer! "Having," says he, "a desire to depart and be with Christ." Phil. i. 23. The good man's language should uniformly be this: "All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come." Job, xiv. 14.

Wicked men in their prayers are uniformly governed more by their own corrupt inclinations, than by the will of God. The Israelites in the
wilder-

wilderness were cursed in the gratification of their appetites. " So they did eat, and were well filled, for he gave them their desire, they were not estranged from their lust; but while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel." Psa. lxxviii. 29. 31. The unbelieving Jews would give no credit to Christ's being the Messiah, by any of those ordinary proofs which constrained so many to cry out, under the powerful conviction of it, " This is of a truth that prophet which should come into the world." John, vi. 14. If they believe on him, they will have the evidence of his being the Christ at their own time, and in their own way. " The Pharisees also, with the Sadducees, came, and, tempting, desired him that he should shew them a sign from heaven." Matt. xvi. 1.; and when he was crucified, the same evangelist says, " Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him." Ch. xxvi. 41, 42. But Christ has wisely and truly said of all such proud objectors, ancient and modern, " If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." Luke, xvi. 31. Others pray to God with

with a view to make him a party in their worldly and carnal conflicts. Such was the prayer presented to our Lord, Luke, xii. 13. "And one of the company said to him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." Such have been the supplications which whole nations have presented to God on their days of fasting and prayer, when the holy and merciful God has been solicited to sanction and promote undertakings, which are both hateful to him, and subversive of every principle of humanity and justice. Such were also the prayers of some professors in the times of the apostle James, to whom he thus addressed himself: "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." James, iv. 3. If wicked men pray under this unholy disposition, God either will not grant their request, or he will answer them in anger, as he did Balaam, when he desired to fulfil the wishes of Balak for reward; the Lord said, Go, but sent an angel to obstruct his passage, and reproved him by the mouth of the beast on which he rode. Numb. xxii. 20. 30. If the children of God should ever be influenced by this temper of mind, God has too great a regard to his own glory, and their good, to give them according to their petition; he will answer them according to the love he bears them. When Paul had a thorn in the flesh, and the messenger of Satan to buffet him,

he

he besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him; and in this prayer he consulted his own ease; but God refused to comply with his request, and gave him more than an equivalent, when he said, "My grace is sufficient for thee." 2 Cor. xii. 7. 9. So that God's denials and God's bestowments are alike gracious, and should lead the Christian to adopt the words of the poet—

Good when he gives, supremely good,
Nor less when he denies;
E'en crosses from his sov'reign hand
Are blessings in disguise. WATTS.

When a believer is in a right frame, the preface of his prayer is, "Thy will be done." The will of God is revealed in the scriptures; the good which he designs to bestow, and which his children ask in prayer, is fully and freely held forth in the promises; the sufficiency of which is accurately described by the apostle, when he says, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and that which is to come." 1 Tim. iv. 8. Let us then study and search the scriptures much, with a view to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Rom. xii. 2. And if we attain to an acquaintance with the mind and will of God, we may take the full encouragement of that beautiful and comprehensive promise, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye

“ ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done
 “ unto you.” John, xv. 7.

If any should be disposed to ask how they may know that what they pray for is according to the will of God? I answer: When we pray for that which tends to glorify God; for at this we should aim in every thing. This was the grand end which Elijah proposed in his prayer for fire to come down on the altar which he had made in the presence of the priests of Baal; it was not for his own vindication, honour, or interest; it was not for the gratification of his own pride and vanity; but he is influenced solely by a regard to God's glory and his people's good, when he pours out this ardent prayer, “ Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that
 “ this people may know that thou art the Lord
 “ God, and that thou hast turned their heart
 “ back again.” 1 Kings, xviii. 37.

We pray according to the will of God, when we are more earnest for wisdom and grace, rightly to perform the duty of our stations in the church, and in the world, than to be rich and great. We have a fine example of this in Solomon, when the Lord said, “ Ask what I shall
 “ give thee,” and he replied, “ O Lord my God,
 “ thou hast made thy servant king instead of
 “ David my father; and I am but a little child;
 “ I know not how to go out or come in: and
 “ thy servant is in the midst of thy people
 “ which thou hast chosen, a great people, that
 “ cannot

“ cannot be numbered nor counted for multi-
 “ tude. Give therefore thy servant an under-
 “ standing heart to judge thy people, that I may
 “ discern between good and bad, for who is able
 “ to judge this thy so great a people? And the
 “ speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had
 “ asked this thing.” 1 Kings, iii. 5. 7, 8, 9, 10.
 And whoever is enabled to pray by this rule, and
 in this spirit, may with some propriety use the
 strong and consolatory language of 1 John, v. 14.
 “ And this is the confidence that we have in him,
 “ that, if we ask any thing according to his will,
 “ he heareth us.”

3. It enters very materially into the nature of
 true prayer, that we should ask all in the name
 and for the sake of Jesus Christ. This funda-
 mental law of christianity is violated by all those
 who avow they adore the eternal God only
 through the medium of his works, and reject the
 word of God as a fabulous and unprofitable
 book; by such as reject the doctrine of the atone-
 ment, a doctrine which is taught in the fullest and
 clearest manner, both in the Jewish and in the
 Christian dispensations; and also, by all them who
 make the supposed goodness of their own hearts,
 and the purity of their manners, the foundation
 of their hope of mercy and acceptance at the
 throne of grace. And whilst some reject the
 mediation of Christ altogether, others lose
 nearly all the advantages of this divine and gra-
 cious

cious medium of access to God: the Papist, by adding to the mediation of Christ that of saints and angels; the Protestant, by mingling his own weak and imperfect services with the all-perfect obedience of Him, who "by one offering hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." Heb. x. 14.

The truth is, that, as sinners, we have forfeited all right, either to temporal or spiritual blessings; we can therefore neither ask nor receive any thing at the hand of God but as a matter of favour. The seat which he is described as occupying in the church, and from which he communes with his people, is "the mercy-seat," Exod. xxv. 22.; it is "the throne of grace," Heb. iv. 16.; and all the bestowments made from thence are mere favours. May he not then exercise his own pleasure as to the way and manner in which he will dispense them?

The doctrine of scripture upon this subject may be comprised under three branches. 1st. Jesus Christ by his death opened the way of access to the throne of grace, by taking away the curse of the law we had broken, and satisfying the claims of divine justice, against which we had heinously offended. Till this was done, there could be no friendship or fellowship between God and us; and that it is all done by the obedience and death of Christ, is plain from the two following scriptures: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness

“ by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” Heb. x.

19. 22. Again it is said, “ When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons; and because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

Gal. iv. 6.

2d. All the blessings which are sought in prayer are treasured up in Christ, and communicated to us through him. In one scripture the church is said to be blessed “ with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” Eph.

i. 3. In another it is said, “ Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” John,

in 16. 3. and, in a third, the apostle Paul tells the church at Philippi, “ My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Phil. iv. 19.

3d. It is the express law of divine revelation, that whoever approaches the throne of grace, in prayer, should come in the name, and depend on the merit of Jesus Christ. It is upon this very ground

ground that our Lord teaches his disciples to expect an answer to their prayers: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." John, xvi. 23.

I proceed to shew,

Thirdly, The obligations men are under to pray to God, especially those who are favoured with divine revelation. It is a duty which naturally results from the relation God stands in to men as their creator and benefactor. We are the creatures of his power; "in him we live, and move, and have our being." Acts, xvii. 28. "Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." James, i. 17. It is therefore our duty to approach God, and render to him the undisguised homage of our hearts, giving him unfeigned thanksgiving for the numberless blessings we have received, and supplicating his goodness to supply all the wants, and afford us all the deliverances that may be requisite in time to come.

It becomes our duty, from the express manner in which it is enjoined upon us in his holy word. With all the discoveries he made of his love and favour to the Jews, with all the promises he gave them of his presence and blessing, he mingled such declarations as these: "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Ezek. xxxvi. 37. Christ described the nature and extent of this duty, when "he spake

“ a parable unto them to this end, that men
 “ ought always to pray, and not to faint.” Luke,
 xviii. 1. Nor is it merely of good men that we
 say they *ought* to pray, inasmuch as Peter thus
 addressed Simon Magus: “ Pray God, if perhaps
 “ the thought of thine heart may be forgiven
 “ thee.” Acts, viii. 22. And another apostle
 speaks thus: “ Draw nigh to God, and he will
 “ draw nigh to you; cleanse your hands, ye sin-
 “ ners, and purify your hearts, ye double-
 “ minded.” James, iv. 8.

Again, Our obligation to prayer results from
 our circumstances and characters. In whatever
 light we consider ourselves, whether as creatures,
 as sinners, or as Christians, there is need of much
 prayer. As creatures, we are weak and frail,
 and “ stand in jeopardy every hour.” 1 Cor. xv.
 30. As sinners, we are, in a spiritual sense,
 “ wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind,
 “ and naked.” Rev, iii. 17. And if through
 grace we have been made Christians, we shall feel
 a continual obligation to prayer, arising out of
 the multitude of our wants, the strength and zeal
 of our spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh, and
 the devil, together with innumerable afflictions
 to bear, and great duties to perform; to all
 which, even the strongest Christian is insufficient
 of himself, through ignorance, weakness, and
 unbelief. Hence, we may discern the necessity
 of daily adopting such language as this: “ Give

“ us

" us this day our daily bread, and forgive us
 " our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us
 " not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."
 Matt. vi. 12, 13.

Our obligation to prayer may be inferred from the example of Christ, who, being in his human nature inferior and subject to his Father, is represented as incessantly occupied in prayer to him. In one place he is described as asking " the heaven for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession." Psa. ii. 8. In another it is said, that he " offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears." Heb. v. 7. In being therefore under a continual obligation to prayer, we are made like unto our living and glorious Head, in the days of his humiliation.

Fourthly, In the duty of prayer there is nothing of more importance than faith: Christ therefore particularly mentions it in this text.

No real believer, either minister or private Christian, can undervalue either practical godliness or genuine morality; consequently, the high commendations they give of faith, and the high value they set upon it, should not be construed as militating against these. Faith is a grace of high importance in the Christian religion; it has an extensive and active part assigned it in every part thereof, but especially in the believer's devotional exercises. The promise of receiving

made in the text, is not to mere asking; for it runs thus; "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive." The importance of faith in our approach to God is strongly marked in the following scripture: "But without faith it is impossible to please God. He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Heb. xi. 6. There is much truth in that remark of the Jews, though it was applied to bad purpose: "We know that God heareth not sinners." John, ix. 31. When the apostle James is recommending prayer, and holding forth the encouragement arising from the divine liberality, he says of the person praying, "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed; for let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." James, i. 5, 6, 7. Our remarks upon this head are elucidated and confirmed by the history of Cain and Abel; the one a wicked, and the other a righteous man. The fact, as related in the Old Testament, is this: "Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel he also brought an offering of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof; and the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering, but unto Cain and his offering the Lord had not respect." Gen. iv. 3, 5. The New Testament

ment comment upon this passage runs thus: " By
 " faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent
 " sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained wit-
 " ness that he was righteous, God testifying of
 " his gifts; and by it he being dead, y^t speak-
 " eth." Heb. xi. 4. What a difference between
 these two persons! what a difference between the
 offerings they present to God! what a different
 reception they meet with!—and all this the apostle
 affirms to be " by faith."

The scriptures are full of matter, tending to en-
 courage our souls, and to enlarge and strengthen
 the actings of faith in our approaches to God in
 prayer. God is every where described as a God of
 infinite condescension and goodness; as a God
 hearing and answering prayer; as always waiting
 to be gracious: and from these views of God,
 faith draws the most encouraging conclusions.

Sometimes faith grounds its encouragement
 upon the ability of God. To Abraham, the Lord
 said, " I am God Almighty," Gen. xvii. 1. or God
 All-sufficient. The apostle Paul encourages the
 faith of the church at Ephesus by telling them, God
 " is able to do exceeding abundantly above all
 " that we ask or think." Eph. iii. 20. If unbe-
 lief starts a difficulty, and says, " Can God furnish
 " a table in the wilderness?" Psa. lxxviii. 19.
 faith, calculating upon the omnipotence of God,
 replies, " My God shall supply all your need ac-
 cording

“ cording to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”
Phil. iv. 19.

At other times, strong faith in prayer is excited in the believer's soul by a consideration of the relation God stands in to him. He is his God and father. Christ had an eye to this when he thus addressed his disciples : “ After this manner therefore pray ye ; Our Father which art in heaven.” Matt. vi. 9. And when the prodigal finally resolved to arise and seek salvation, his language ran thus : “ I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.” Luke, xv. 18, 19. His reception far exceeds all his expectations; for, “ when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” Ver. 20. In like manner Old Testament saints encouraged themselves in approaching God, saying, “ O come, let us worship and bow down ; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker : for he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.” Psa. xcv. 6, 7.

Again, Faith is nourished by the covenant engagements of God, which are unalterable, God himself having said, “ My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.” Psa. lxxxix. 34. David had earnestly
endea-

endeavoured after, and long prayed for the spiritual and eternal salvation of his family, and still the prospect was dark, distressing, and uncertain; but faith assisted him to continue waiting and hoping, and comforted him with this reflection: " Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow." 2 Sam. ii. 3. 5.

Once more, The Christian has strong ground for faith in prayer, in those many great and precious promises with which the scriptures abound. On what principle can he indulge doubts and fears in his access to God, while it is said to him, " Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you?" Matt. vii. 7. Nor is he encouraged only by such general promises as these, but there are promises suited to all the variety of circumstances into which he can possibly come, and to all the diversity of frames he is susceptible of in his experience.

There is also much encouragement for faith in prayer, from the doctrine of Divine Providence; not merely from the doctrine of that general providence which extends its care to all men and creatures indiscriminately, but from that peculiar and special providence which God exercises over the objects of his love, and of which David speaks

speaks so suitably: "The eyes of the Lord are
 "over the righteous, and his ears are open to
 "their cry." Psa. xxxiv. 15. There is a similar
 description of God's special regard to his church
 in 2 Chron. vii. 15.: "Now mine eyes shall be
 "open, and mine ears attend to the prayer that
 "is made in this place. For now have I chosen
 "and sanctified this house, that my name may
 "be there for ever, and mine eyes and mine
 "heart shall be there perpetually."

Lastly, The strongest ground of faith in our
 access to the Father, is the Redeemer's mediation,
 in his death, resurrection, and appearance in hea-
 ven for us, together with the Holy Spirit's inter-
 cession within us, with groanings which cannot be
 uttered. But as these topics will, in the course
 of the following sermons, be the subject of par-
 ticular discussion, we shall not enlarge upon them
 here, but proceed to a close, with an observation
 or two by way of improvement: and,

I. I address myself to you who live totally
 without prayer. You lie down at night, rise up
 in the morning, and pass through the day, with-
 out ever bowing your knee to the God and Fa-
 ther of our Lord Jesus Christ; or even so much
 as sending up one thankful acknowledgment to
 Heaven for its care and goodness, or one petition
 for their continuance. You virtually renounce
 all idea of obligation to, and dependence upon,
 God. Yours is, indeed, an awful state, and is

accu-

accurately drawn by the pencil of truth : " The
 " wicked, through the pride of his countenance,
 " will not seek after God. God is not in all his
 " thoughts. His ways are always grievous ; thy
 " judgments are far above out of his sight ; as
 " for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He
 " hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved,
 " for I shall never be in adversity." Psa. x. 4—6.
 Dream not, poor sinner, that thy false confidence
 will be always equally strong, or that thy con-
 science will be always equally tranquil : no ; the day
 of affliction and darkness may soon approach ; the
 day of death must come, and it may come both
 soon and suddenly ; and then, " to whom will
 " you flee for help ? and where will you leave
 " your glory ?" Isa. x. 3. Will your prayerless
 soul, think you, then despise God, salvation, and
 heaven, as it has done all through the days of
 your health and prosperity ? It is most likely not ;
 but rather you will try to pray for yourself, and
 desire all around you to pray for you. Justly
 may the Lord then say to you, " Where are thy
 " gods that thou hast made thee ? let them arise,
 " if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble."
 Jer. ii. 28.

2. I address myself to those who make a con-
 science of paying homage to God in prayer, but
 whose prayers are mere lip-service, nothing more
 than pharisaic devotions, which spring from a
 self-righteous spirit, and are directed to an end
 which

which they never can attain, namely, that of procuring the remission of sins, and an entrance to eternal glory. Such prayers are generally offered without any just apprehensions of the God to whom they are addressed, and without that temper of mind, and that regard to the scripture rules for prayer, which are so essential to praying in spirit and in truth. They are so defective and erroneous in every respect, that they might, without much impropriety, have that sentence inscribed upon them, which the apostle saw upon an Athenian altar, "To the unknown God." Acts, xvii. 23. Such persons know not God spiritually or savingly; and hence, though they perform many outward duties, and, among the rest, say prayers to God as the Jews did, the words of the prophet are applicable to both: "They know not me, saith the Lord." Jer. ix. 3.

3. But I trust I am speaking to many who know what it is to pray in a scriptural and acceptable manner. To stir up your minds to unfeigned gratitude, let me remind you what obligations you are under to the word of God, in which the object of prayer is revealed, and encouragements to prayer held forth in almost every page; how much you owe for the success of all your prayers to the prevalent intercession of Christ, and the divine aid of the Holy Spirit. And be sure, Christian, whilst you are praying for spiritual blessings, use all the means by which
 God

God has been accustomed to convey them; and be constantly looking for that blessed day, when you shall feel no more spiritual wants, but have prayer changed into everlasting praise. To which happiness may the good Lord bring us all, for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

SER-

SERMON II.

**PERSEVERANCE AND WATCHFULNESS
IN PRAYER.**



EPHESIANS, vi. 18.

Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

JEHOVAH is the invifible God; no man hath feen him at any time; nor can his perfections and charaéter be rightly difcovered, but through the operations of his own hand; thefe are detailed in three divifions, each part forming a volume full of rich and heavenly inftitution, and which, if carefully read, and properly underftood, will not fail to make us wife to eternal falvation.

The firft of thefe volumes is the book of Nature, which contains a wide and ample field of inftitution for the humble and inquiring Chriftian. So manifold and fo wonderful are all the parts of the material world, from the heavenly bodies down to the atoms of duft which we

trample under our feet, that wherever we turn our eyes, whether to the heavens above, or to the earth beneath, all is mysterious and grand. Man himself is a world in miniature, he is "fearfully and wonderfully made;" Psa. cxxxix. 14.; and to him, in an especial manner, do "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work." Psa. xix. 1. O that men were wise, that they did but hear and understand what all nature conspires to sing in one grand and perpetual chorus, namely, the wisdom, goodness, and omnipotence of Jehovah!

Another medium by which the great God condescends to unveil his glory to man, is the book of Providence. In the government of the world and the church, there is a perpetual emanation of his divine and glorious perfections: here mercy and righteousness, goodness and severity, are wisely and beautifully blended, and administered with an impartial though with a sovereign hand. The more carefully we observe and look into, and the more fully we become acquainted with this book, we discover the more effectually our own ignorance and weakness; are the more readily impelled to acknowledge with David, "Clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne," Psa. xcvi. 2.; and to exclaim with the apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

“ God ! How unsearchable are his judgments,
 “ and his ways past finding out ! ” Rom. xi. 33.

But though nature and providence are full of God, and reflect his glory to man, they are the least, they are but secondary parts of his glorious works. The first and the greatest of all, that which strikes angelic minds with the greatest force, and into which those holy and intelligent beings most ardently desire to look, is the glorious work of his grace, the redemption of lost sinners by the obedience and death of the Son of God. In this stupendous work, the unfathomable depths of his wisdom shine with an effulgent brightness; in this work are displayed the unsearchable riches of divine grace, and the omnipotence of Jehovah's power : this is the theme which gladdens the hearts and inspires the tongues of perishing men with songs of heavenly praise ; yea, it is to the praise of this godlike work that the choirs above tune their golden harps, and with one accord shout, “ Worthy is
 “ the Lamb that was slain, to receive power,
 “ and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and
 “ honour, and glory, and blessing.” Rev. v. 12.

The effectual conversion of one sinner by the preaching of the gospel is a miracle of grace, and causes joy even among the angels ; how much more must this be the case, when a multitude cast aside their dumb idols, and turn to the worship of the one living and true God ; that God “ who

“ was

“ was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.” 2 Cor. v. 19. Such was the happy effect produced by Paul’s preaching among the worshippers of the goddess Diana at Ephesus, and a church was planted there which flourished for many years: to which church the apostle wrote this epistle; in which, doctrinal, experimental, and practical truths are most happily blended, and discoursed upon in his usual style of eloquent simplicity.

The believing Ephesians are here taught by the apostle what they have now to expect in this world;—nothing less than a constant warfare, and that too with no common enemy,—as may be seen by the description given in the following words: “ We wrestle not against flesh and
 “ blood, but against principalities, against powers,
 “ against the rulers of the darkness of this world,
 “ against spiritual wickedness in high places,” ver. 12. He would not have them, however, be discouraged by the view of either the multitude or the strength of their opposers, nor yet to trust in the least degree to their own wisdom and strength, but says, “ Finally, my brethren, be
 “ strong in the Lord, and in the power of his
 “ might,” ver. 10.: and when Christians can do this in the exercise of a strong faith, they may despise all the efforts of their most potent and malignant foe, and exult in the beautiful lan-

guage of the apostle, " If God be for us, who
" can be against us?" Rom. viii. 31.

To manage the arduous conflict with success,
it is requisite we should put on " the whole ar-
" mour of God," ver. 13. which the apostle thus
describes: " Having your loins girt about with
" truth, and having on the breastplate of righ-
" teousness, and your feet shod with the prepa-
" ration of the gospel of peace. Above all,
" taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall
" be able to quench all the fiery darts of the
" wicked. And take the helmet of salvation,
" and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word
" of God." And then he introduces the words
of my text, " Praying always," &c. intimating
that it was not enough to be duly apprized of the
nature and strength of the enemy, and to have
on the armour of defence ready for the attack;
but even then there must be much and constant
prayer to God for wisdom, courage, and ability,
to persevere in the conflict; for having once en-
tered the field under Jesus, the captain of our
salvation, we must never think of obtaining peace,
or putting off our armour, till we have reached
the blissful shores of our heavenly Canaan, and
can join in that delightful triumph of the church:
" Now is come salvation and strength, and the
" kingdom of our God, and the power of his
" Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast
" down, which accused them before our God day
" and

“ and night; and they overcame him by the
“ blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their
“ testimony.” Rev. xii. 10, 11. In our text the
apostle directs the Ephesians—

First, To pray with all prayer.

Secondly, To pray always.

Thirdly, To unite with prayer, caution and
watchfulness.

Fourthly, To pray in the spirit.

After discoursing upon these particulars, we
shall notice the influence which all these have
upon our Christian warfare.

First, Christians are to be found praying “ with
“ all prayer.” What is the import of this ex-
pression? It may be considered under two ideas.

I. There are divers kinds of prayer. II. Prayer
has a diversity of parts.

I. There are divers kinds of prayer: among
the most conspicuous is placed *public prayer*. It
has ever been the practice of the saints of God,
in the patriarchal, prophetic, and apostolic ages,
to mingle their prayers and thanksgivings at one
altar; and it is with an immediate reference to
public devotions that the apostle says, “ Not for-
“ saking the assembling of ourselves together,
“ as the manner of some is.” Heb. x. 25. The
delight and satisfaction which good men feel in this
heavenly service may be seen by the language of
the Psalmist: “ I was glad when they said unto me,
“ Let us go into the house of the Lord; our feet

“ shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem !”
Psa. cxxii. 1, 2.

Another kind of prayer is denominated *social*. In most churches where the gospel is faithfully preached, and the power of it sweetly experienced upon the hearts of its professed believers, there is at least one evening in the week appropriated by the church for a meeting of prayer in its associate capacity; and where these social meetings have been properly conducted, they have proved highly beneficial both to the minister and the church.

There is also *family prayer*. This is an important part of religion in every district of Zion, but especially in those places where the gospel is either not preached at all in purity and power, or preached but very seldom. In such places it is doubly necessary that the head of the Christian family should be a preacher in it, and a mouth for it to the Lord.

Another kind of prayer is *secret* or *closet prayer*: it has had the last epithet applied to it from the circumstance of our Lord enjoining the duty in these words: “ When thou prayest, enter into thy closet; and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.” Matt. vi. 6. And,

Lastly, there is *ejaculatory prayer*, by which the soul can converse with its God in all places and at all times.

I have only just named these different kinds of prayer,

prayer, without entering into any discussion of their nature and use, purposing to call your attention to them separately at a future period. I shall content myself at present with only making an observation or two upon them all collectively.

1. They are all important: none of them can be slighted with propriety by the real Christian, because they have all some relation to the duty which attaches to his character as a believer, and as a member of the church of Christ.

2. They occupy distinct and separate stations in the good man's general sphere of action, and it should be his care to keep them from clashing one with the other. As in a well-constructed

piece of mechanism every wheel and every pin has its proper station, and performs its office in a regular manner, all operating to the production of one grand effect; so it is in religion; "for God is not the author of confusion." 1 Cor. xiv. 33. We are not to be at home engaging in

private prayer, when duty calls us to public prayer in the church; nor ought we to be at public prayer in the church, when family religion should occupy us at home: let us so husband our time as to regard them all, and to regard each one in its proper time and season.

3. It is natural to infer, from the view we have been taking of prayer, what a burden religion must be to a worldly man: he will be ready to exclaim, "What I am I to attend to public, and social, and family,

and private, and ejaculatory prayer? Surely some of these must be superfluous; it is more than human nature can bear; it is enough to kill one, at least it is enough to make one completely melancholy." 4. With the real Christian it is exactly the reverse of all this: multiplied as are the duties of religion in the house of the Lord and at home, they are not irksome to him; they are in his estimation privileges: he can say with truth, that the service of his God "is perfect freedom." His soul being formed anew in Christ Jesus, prayer is his element, his heart is at home in that holy exercise, excepting in some few seasons of darkness and unbelief, when his soul drags on heavily in the Christian life.

II. Prayer is composed of a variety of parts. Some arrange these under a smaller, and some under a larger number of particulars. From the examples of prayer which we have in the Old Testament, and also from the manner in which Christ taught his disciples to pray, I am led to divide the parts of prayer into—Adoration, Confession, Petition, and Thanksgiving. In the preface to the Lord's prayer, we adore God as the infinitely holy God and our gracious Father; in the body of that prayer, which is generally divided into six parts, whilst we petition for forgiveness, supply, and protection, we tacitly confess our sinfulness, poverty, and weakness; and in the conclusion, which is an ascription of praise and glory

glory to God, we acknowledge that, for all our blessings, temporal and spiritual, we are indebted to his sovereign goodness and his omnipotent power.

1. When we approach God in prayer, it should be with sentiments of profound veneration: he is the infinitely great and eternal God, and we are creatures but of yesterday: he is the holy and righteous God, and we sinners by nature and by practice. If then we know who and what God is, when we come near to his throne, we shall adore and worship him in the most humble and devout manner. A view of his majesty and greatness will penetrate our souls with godly fear, and a sense of the riches of his mercy will inspire us with trust and confidence in his promises: our souls will feel much of that temper which is manifested in the language of Nebuchadnezzar: "I
 " blessed the Most High, and I praised and ho-
 " noured Him that liveth for ever, whose domi-
 " nion is an everlasting dominion, and his king-
 " dom is from generation to generation: and all
 " the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as no-
 " thing; and he doth according to his will in the
 " army of heaven and among the inhabitants of
 " the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say
 " unto him, What dost thou?" Dan. iv. 34, 35.

2. Another part of prayer is *Confession*. The deep depravity of our nature, the heart being
 " deceitful above all things, and desperately

“ wicked,” Jer. xvii. 9. and the numberless sins of omission and commission which proceed from that corrupt source, furnish abundant matter for this part of prayer. We never can discern the glory of God, as he is the God of grace, till we are convinced of sin, and brought to confess it in an open, sincere, and penitent manner; not only open and outward sin, but the sin of our nature, our heart sins, for these lie with as much weight on the conscience of a real penitent, as those sins which are visible to the eyes of our fellow-creatures. The fifty-first Psalm, the language of the returning prodigal, and of the publican who went up into the temple to pray, are among the finest examples of genuine confession, of that kind of confession which the scriptures connect with salvation, inasmuch as it is said, “ If we confess
 “ our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us
 “ our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John, i. 9.

3. The next branch of true prayer is *Petition*. Man is an indigent creature in every respect, and can never be addressed in more suitable language than this: “ Thou art wretched, and miserable,
 “ and poor, and blind, and naked.” Rev. iii. 17. He is, therefore, in himself the most forlorn and dependent creature; but it is only the Christian who sees and feels, and consequently acts in conformity to this humbling truth: he comes as a beggar to the door of mercy, not with a proud or
 self-

self-righteous spirit, telling God Almighty what a good creature he is, and of course that he has a right to ask and to expect his approbation and blessing; but rather he comes complaining of himself as a guilty, sinful creature, and supplicating the God of grace for the free and unmerited bestowment of temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings.

4. The last branch of prayer is *Thanksgiving* and *Praise*. This is mentioned in a very distinct manner by the apostle, in his letter to the church at Philippi: "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Phil. iv. 6. This branch of the subject may be divided into two parts. In the first there is a particular and direct acknowledgment made to God for mercies received. We may illustrate this point by the language of David, who, after ruminating in his own mind upon the merciful and gracious manner in which God had dealt with him, breaks forth in this devotional strain: "Bless the Lord, O my soul! and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies." Psa. ciii. 2, 3. The other branch of thanksgiving is more general, consisting of animated ascriptions of praise to God, as the sovereign

reign and omnipotent agent from whom descend all our blessings, in nature, providence, and grace. We have one example of this in the Lord's prayer: "For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." Matt. vi. 13. and another in the epistle of Jude, ver. 24, 25. "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

Secondly, In this text the apostle recommends "praying always," which may design to shew, that in every undertaking we should seek the blessing and assistance of God by prayer. In a passage I have but just cited, Phil. iv. 6. the apostle recommends prayer "in every thing," and the propriety and importance of it is evident by the influence prayer has upon the whole circle of a Christian's duties, cares, and comforts; for it may be said of them all, that they are "sanctified by the word of God and prayer." 1 Tim. iv. 5. Every work of the good man's hand should be prefaced, accompanied with, and followed by prayer: his whole life should be a life of prayer, giving himself, as the apostles did, "continually to prayer," Acts, vi. 4.; "night and day praying exceedingly." 1 Theff. iii. 10. In fact, Christians on earth should be all prayer, as the saints
in

in heaven are all praise. Nor is it necessary for this purpose that they should go out of the world, or seclude themselves from it by a monastic life, inasmuch as a life of prayer is not incompatible with a proper attention to the lawful concerns of our respective stations in society.

In this part of the subject I shall particularly urge upon you constancy and perseverance in prayer, in which I shall aim principally to reprove those, who, having once exercised themselves in this good work, have totally abandoned it; and also to encourage those who are tempted to decline it, because of the discouragements they meet with in practising it.

1. To you who have in past times bowed your knee to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and now live prayerless, we say, "Ye did run well, who did hinder you?" Gal. x. 5. 7. That men may make a fair show in the flesh by an outward profession of religion, and afterwards turn aside to sin and folly, is a truth every where supposed in the word of God, and under every dispensation exemplified by the most awful examples. Nor will this be matter of surprise, when it is recollected how many take up a profession of religion, and attend to the outward duties of it, who never experienced any real change of heart, without which it is hardly possible for their profession to be uniform or lasting, seeing "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," John, iii. 6.;
and

and consequently sooner or later such persons may be thus addressed: "Thou casteth off fear, and
 "restrainest prayer before God." Job, xv. 4. The Jews were an awful instance of this, as appears by Psalm lxxviii. 34—37. "When he slew them,
 "then they sought him, and they returned, and
 "inquired early after God; and they remembered
 "that God was their rock, and the high God
 "their redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter
 "him with their mouths, and they lied unto him
 "with their tongues; for their hearts were not
 "right with him, neither were they stedfast in
 "his covenant."

The temporary and short-lived nature of the disposition of some men to pray, may be seen in the case of affrighted mariners, whose distress and conduct, when in danger of shipwreck, is beautifully described in the following passage: "They
 "that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the
 "Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he
 "commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind which
 "lifteth up the waves thereof." They mount up
 "to the heavens, they go down again to the
 "depths; their soul is melted because of trouble;
 "they reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken
 "man, and are at their wit's end. Then they
 "cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he
 "bringeth them out of their distresses. He
 "maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves
 "thereof

“ thereof are still ; then are they glad, because
 “ they are quiet : so he bringeth them unto their
 “ desired haven.” Psa. cvii. 23—30. But no
 sooner is the storm ended, and they find them-
 selves in safety, than they utterly forget the God
 on whom they called, and continue to blaspheme
 his glorious name, and transgress his holy com-
 mandments with impunity. Persons so circum-
 stanced are generally impelled to pray through
 fear, and when that subsides they think no more
 of calling upon God.

Such also is the prayer of the man who is af-
 frighted by the grand and awful representations
 which the Almighty is pleased sometimes to make
 of himself, in earthquakes, inundations, yea even
 in ordinary storms of thunder and lightning. In
 regard to which it may be truly said, “ The voice
 “ of the Lord is upon the waters ; the God of
 “ glory thundereth ; the Lord is upon many wa-
 “ ters. The voice of the Lord is powerful ; the
 “ voice of the Lord is full of majesty ; the
 “ voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars,” &c.
 Psa. xxix. 3—5. These faint displays of the ma-
 jesty of God sometimes strike a terror into the
 hearts of careless sinners, little short of the im-
 pression made upon the Israelites, when they saw
 the lightning and heard the thunder at Sinai,
 and stood trembling with fear. Under such feel-
 ings even the prayerless begin to think of God,
 call upon him for preservation, and make a few
 good

good resolutions, which are seldom if ever thought of again.

Again, This subject is illustrated by the prayers of the sick man, who, while his recovery is yet doubtful, is constant and devout in his supplications. Indeed, we have been called to pray with persons apparently in dying circumstances, whose confession of sin was so humble and ingenuous, whose tears seemed to bespeak such unfeigned repentance, and whose prayers seemed so evidently the real language of the heart, that we could scarce doubt (much as we have seen of the deceitfulness and wickedness of the human heart) but that the same grace which was extended to the dying thief, at the eleventh hour, had found an entrance into their souls. But how has it ended? God has blessed the means, a recovery has been effected, and we have anxiously looked for the evidence of a true conversion; but we have looked in vain: all their devotion evaporated on the first symptom of returning health, and they have risen up from the bed of affliction and disease to serve the world and sin with seven-fold ardour. To such persons may be applied the words of our Lord, "The last state of that man is worse than the first." Matt. xii. 45.

We address this part of our subject to backsliders in general. You, in times past, fought God by prayer, not only in the public assembly
of

of his saints, but also in your closet; but now you have lost all the good impressions you once had, though, like Felix, whilst the preacher reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment, you trembled, Acts, xxiv. 25.; though, like Herod, you heard the word gladly, and did many things, Mark, vi. 20. yet now you set truth and conscience at defiance: there is too much reason to fear that you was only "a hearer of the word;" that you never had the true spirit of prayer; that you never felt the real power and sweetness of it; that in your most prosperous state of profession you was never delivered from the love and power of sin; and that you ultimately threw it off, because you could not bear the check it put upon your love of the world, and the gratification of your appetites. If this is your character, what are you better than an apostate? How awful is your state! How justly may the words of scripture be applied to you! "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." 2 Pet. ii. 21, 22. If you have been a real partaker of the grace of God, you will be brought back again,
but

but it will be with much weeping and supplication.

2. I come now to urge constancy and perseverance in prayer on those Christians who are often tempted to leave it off. The scriptures would not have abounded with such exhortations as "Pray without ceasing," 1 Theff. v. 16. "Continuing instant in prayer," Rom. xii. 12. were it not that the soul is liable to be discouraged by difficulties and temptations. These are so many and so strong, that if God had not again and again helped his people, they had listened to the suggestions of unbelief, and declined their visits at a throne of grace.

Sometimes they are tempted to this by their want of liberty and enlargement in prayer: it is, doubtless, very desirable to have these; but they are not essential to true prayer: the soul may be much harassed and oppressed in the exercise, when, nevertheless, it may truly wrestle with God, and obtain the blessing. The publican and the prodigal, the one mentioned in the eighteenth, and the other in the fifteenth of Luke, might both feel the want of liberty in prayer; but we know that they prayed with the spirit, and were heard and accepted; and it is not unlikely, in our own experience, that those prayers which have the strongest tendency to empty and abase our proud hearts have been most prevalent with God.

Others

Others are discouraged in prayer, because they feel so many short-comings and imperfections in their prayers. "When I come to a throne of grace," says the poor soul, "there is such darkness in my understanding, such hardness upon my heart, such wanderings of thought, and withal so many doubts and fears harass my mind, that when I think what a holy and righteous God he is to whom I pray, I conclude he will not, he cannot regard such prayers as mine." You forget, Christian, too much and too often, that your prayers do not come up before your heavenly Father in their imperfect state, but that they pass through the hands of Jesus Christ, and are perfumed with the incense of his merit. Rev. viii. 3, 4.

Others are tempted to give up seeking the Lord by prayer, because he delays to answer them. These are often crying out, "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through," Lam. iii. 44.; or in the language of that prophet who said, "O Lord! how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!" Hab. i. 2. Remember, Christian, that though God makes promise of hearing and answering prayer, he acts in a sovereign way as to the time and manner in which he will do it. We are taught this by the following declaration: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie; though it
E "tarry,

"tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come,
 "it will not tarry." Hab. ii. 3. We have also
 many striking instances, in which the Lord
 has kept his people long praying and waiting,
 before he has vouchsafed to say, "Be it unto thee
 "even as thou wilt." David relates his own
 experience in the following text: "I waited pa-
 "tiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me,
 "and heard my cry. He brought me up also
 "out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay,
 "and set my feet upon a rock, and established
 "my goings: and he hath put a new song into
 "my mouth, even praise unto our God." Psa. xl.
 1, 2, 3. And it is also related of Abraham, that
 "after he had patiently endured he obtained the
 "promise." Heb. vi. 15. We are not, therefore,
 warranted to infer a denial from a delay of the good
 we seek by prayer; but rather if, after long seeking,
 the blessing is still suspended, instead of indulging
 ourselves in those misconstructions which reason
 and unbelief suggest, urging us to say, We have
 no interest in God, he will not hear our prayers,
 and such like discouraging and distressing ideas,
 let us imitate the church of old, who, after many
 discouragements, instead of lying down in de-
 spair, took up new and more earnest determina-
 tions to seek him, and persevered till she was
 enabled to say, "I found him whom my soul
 "loveth; I held him, and would not let him
 "go." Sol. Song, iii. 1. 4.

God's

God's delay in answering prayer, though condemned by our reason, and interpreted to be injurious to us, is both wise and gracious on God's part, and ultimately promotes the advantage of our souls. It does this by enhancing the value of the blessing when it comes, and strengthening all the graces of the Spirit. It has an invigorating influence principally upon hope and patience: of the former, one apostle speaks thus: "We are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth why doth he yet hope for? but if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." Rom. viii. 24, 25. Of the latter another apostle speaks thus: "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain; be ye also patient, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." James, v. 7, 8. Be not then, Christian, discouraged by not receiving an immediate answer to your petitions: go on praying; the Lord is not slack concerning his promises; in his own time, and in his own way, he will crown your prayers with a blessing; and even you (multiplied as your doubts and fears may now be) shall have abundant proof, that "praying breath is never spent in vain."

Thirdly, Our text recommends *watching unto prayer*; the nearness and importance of the con-

nexion between praying and watching is plain, by the frequency of those passages in which they are jointly recommended to the Christian. Thus our Lord, " Watch ye, therefore, and " pray-always." Luke, xxi. 36. So the apostle Paul also, " Continue in prayer, and watch in " the same with thanksgiving." Col. iv. 2. Again, by another apostle, it is recommended thus : " Watch unto prayer." 1 Pet. iv. 7. This apostle knew, by fatal experience, the vast importance of what he here recommended. But it is not only strongly recommended in the precepts of the word of God ; but it has been exemplified in the experience and practice of the saints under their various trials, many of whom, in their conflicts with the world, and sin, and Satan, have followed the good example of Nehemiah and his helpers, when they were conspired against by the Arabians, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites : " We made " our prayer unto God, and set a watch against " them day and night." Neh. iv. 9. We are not going to speak of watchfulness in general, but only so far as regards its influence upon our present subject.

1. The Christian should watch for opportunities to pray, or he will but seldom find them : the depravity of our nature, and its constant indisposition for spiritual services, are such, that, without much watchfulness, the duty of prayer will be often neglected, and that too under a pretence of being

being called to duties, either in our families or our callings, which, though of a different nature, are equally important and binding.

2. In prayer we should watch over our own hearts, which are so deceitful and unstable. There can be no time in which it is more needful to attend to the exhortation of the wise man, than when going to a throne of grace: "Keep thy heart with all diligence." Prov. iv. 23. Without this, they will be crowded with vain, worldly, and wicked thoughts; yea, they will be like the temple in the days of our Lord, full of "buyers and sellers." Matt. xxi. 12.

3. Watch against hindrances to stated seasons of prayer. We are in danger of this from many sources; from the multitude and urgency of family cares; the variety of those circumstances which either arise out of our callings in life, or the social connexions in which we stand. But a due attention to early rising, and an orderly and prudential management of our affairs, will be an effectual means of preservation; and without these our souls will surely be hindered.

4. Watch against intruders which would disturb you while exercising in prayer. If it is your desire to "attend upon the Lord without distraction," 1 Cor. vii. 35. you must be constant and diligent in this duty. It is said, that "when the fowls came down upon the carcases, Abram drove them away." Gen. xv. 11. His sacrifice

was not more infested by birds of prey literally, than yours and mine are spiritually; the cares and the enjoyments of life must be watched against, or they will eat up the glory and the comfort of all our devotions. We had need, especially in our public exercises, to make a covenant with our eyes and ears, that they give no entrance to any of those intruders by which our fellowship with God is interrupted, and our hearts drawn away from God and eternal things.

5. Watch against the great enemy of souls, who is ever going about either to destroy them, or to disturb them in their religious exercises, which instrumentally subserve their eternal salvation. The necessity of this is evident from two scriptures: "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them." Job, i. 6. And again we read of "Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him." Zech. iii. 1. If you are believers, you will find resistance and opposition from this quarter, and that you ought ever to be on your watch-tower to guard against the secret and open attacks of this enemy, who was not afraid to assault with his temptations even the Son of God himself.

6. Watch for an answer to prayer. Too many, when they have finished prayer, rise up and go their

their way, and think no more about the matter. Not so the good man; he, like David, will not only say, "Shew us thy mercy, O Lord, and "grant us thy salvation:" but he will add, "I "will hear what God the Lord will speak, for "he will speak peace unto his people and to his "saints, but let them not turn again to folly." Psa. lxxxv. 7, 8. Noah, as a righteous man, must necessarily have prayed for the cessation of the flood, and consequently his removal out of the ark; and it is pleasing to see how often he looked for the answer of prayer; first by sending out the raven and then the dove, that he might by them judge whether the waters were abated from off the earth. After a long interval of drought, Elijah prayed that God would give rain to Israel, and had faith to believe that God would send it, though there had been none for the space of "three years and six months." The Lord had said, "I will send rain on the earth," 1 Kings, xviii. 1. and therefore Elijah sent his servant seven times to see if it were not yet coming; 1 Kings, xviii. 41—46., with James, v. 17, 18. So let us be looking and watching for an answer to prayer.

Fourthly, Christians should *pray in or with the Spirit*. Praying "in the spirit," either means, praying under the influence of the Holy Ghost, or with divine fervour. The former of these will be the subject of a future discourse, and consequently we shall take no notice of it in this place:

for a similar reason we shall take no notice of the last clause of the text, "and supplication for all faints."

In speaking of divine fervour in prayer, I notice,
 1. That it is urged by a variety of scriptures in which prayer is spoken of, all of which imply an earnest and vigorous exercise of the mind. In one place, to pray is to "pour out" the heart, Psa. lxii. 8.; in another it is to "wrestle with God," Gen. xxxii. 24.; in a third it is to "cry," Psa. vii. 8.; in a fourth it is to "sigh and groan," Psa. xii. 5.; in a fifth it is to "strive," Rom. xv. 30.; in a sixth it is to "give God no rest," Isa. lxii. 6.; and, in the text, it is "supplication in the Spirit." In all these places we are taught, that true prayer is very fervent and importunate.

2. Earnestness and fervour in prayer may be urged by the consideration of the value of the blessings for which we pray; nothing less than "grace and glory." Under the former is comprehended the pearl of great price, the unsearchable riches; and under the latter a blessedness which is as inconceivable in its nature, as it is permanent and endless in its duration. If these are the objects for which we pray, is it not a service worthy of engaging the whole heart? Shall we strive and labour after the things which perish, with constant and unabating zeal; and shall we be sluggish and supine where we should be all life and activity? God forbid! Rather let the
 wise

wise maxim of the apostle be ours, "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Rom. xii. 11.

3. We may take an argument to be fervent in prayer from the arduous nature of the conflict in which we are engaged; a conflict in which many that promised fair to maintain it to the end, have either fallen down wounded, or gone over to the enemy; of this number were Judas, and Demas, and Alexander; and from such awful examples arises the cautionary language of the apostle, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 1 Cor. x. 12.

4. Fervency in prayer is recommended by examples recorded in the word of God. Jacob, when on his return to his father's house, was favoured with a manifestation of the angel of the covenant, to whom he said, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me;" which obtained for him this honourable testimony; "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God, and with men, and hast prevailed." Gen. xxxii. 26. 28. We have also a striking example of fervent prayer in the woman who came to our Lord, "and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David! my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." At first Jesus made no reply—this was discouraging. After this the disciples complain of her being troublesome, and desire

desire him to "send her away." To which Christ answered, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of 'the house of Israel.'" This was more discouraging still; but she is not put out of countenance; she came nearer, and worshipped him: then he says, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and 'to cast it to the dogs.'" This would have been enough to have induced many to turn away saying, There is no hope; instead of which, she turns the very objection urged against her into an argument, and at last draws forth this high commendation, "O woman! great is thy faith; be it 'unto thee even as thou wilt.'" Matt. xv. 22—28. Thus persevering and fervent should be the supplications of all God's children; and difficulties and delays should only quicken our ardour, and extend the actings of our faith.

We have another example of great fervour in prayer in our great High-priest, of whom it is said, when he retired into the garden of Gethsemane, that, "being in agony he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was, as it were, great drops 'of blood falling down to the ground.'" Luke, xxii. 44. And in another place, when the Redeemer's praying to his heavenly Father in general is spoken of, he is said to have "offered up 'prayers and supplications with strong crying 'and tears.'" Heb. v. 7.

6. Fervency in prayer is promoted by a suitable apprehension of the issue of our warfare. Every

real believer may say with the apostle, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air." 1 Cor. ix. 26. Christ hath pledged himself to his real disciples, that, however long and sharp the conflict may be, there shall not an hair of their heads perish. Luke, xxi. 18. Let us then often meditate upon this delightful truth: it will not slacken our diligence in the means, nor cool our ardour in prayer, but rather increase and multiply them; yea, the more we see and feel of this truth, and perceive our warfare drawing towards a close, the more shall we be enabled to join in that beautiful and animating truth of the apostle's; "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also which love his appearance." 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

Fifthly, When a Christian maintains a life of prayer according to the directions given in this text, it will produce a very advantageous influence upon his spiritual warfare, and assist him in the use of the armour which God hath provided.

1. By thus exercising ourselves in prayer, we shall *stand* firm in the day of battle. Soldiers who engage an enemy on slippery or rough ground, are subject to great disadvantage, not only

only from their position ; but also, from the fatigue attending it, they are easily foiled. He that is much with God in prayer, stands not only on even but on elevated ground, and must ultimately have the advantage in fighting “ against the “ rulers of the darkness of this world.”

2. Praying always with all prayer has a tendency to inspire the soul with *courage* in this arduous conflict. This is a very necessary qualification in the Christian soldier. That he is not above the danger of cowardice and faintheartedness, is plain by the many exhortations with which the scriptures abound to be of good courage and not be afraid ; as well as the painful instances which are recorded in the sacred volume, especially of Jonah and Peter, who were brought back to the stations they had deserted with weeping and supplication : but living near to God in prayer makes the soul as bold as a lion : hence Elisha, who was a man of much prayer, when his house was surrounded by a host, was enabled to say to his servant, “ Fear not, for they that be with us “ are more than they that be with them.” 2 Kings, vi. 16.

3. They who pray always, and with all prayer, will be *skilful and active* in the use of the Christian armour. The man whose armour is ever so good, who is himself inexpert and unskilful in the use of it, derives but little advantage from it, compared with the man who can use it with dex-

terity! The apostle speaks of some who were "unskilful in the word of righteousness." Heb. v. 13. Such are babes in the family of God, and cannot but shew much weakness in their spiritual warfare.

4. Abounding in prayer has a tendency to keep our armour bright and fit for use; yea, it gives the Christian soldier a promptness for action. By the means of prayer, the girdle of truth and the breastplate of righteousness are girded on tight; the helmet of hope and the shoes of peace fit well, and become proof against the most furious assaults; and the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit are grasped with a firm hand, and are wielded with energy.

5. It is by fervent and persevering prayer that the believer finally obtains the victory in every conflict. Peter had not been so awfully soiled if he had been less confident, and more watchful unto prayer; nor had he been restored from his backslidings, if Christ had not watched over and prayed for him. Whilst we cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and watch in prayer, Satan gains little or no advantage over us; but if we follow Christ as far off as Peter did, we shall deny him, and thereby be cast down from our confidence and our glory. To conclude—

1. Are we engaged in this holy warfare, with the description of which our text is connected? Are we on the Lord's side; or are we, as too many
are,

are, in league with the world, and the flesh, and the devil? If grace has brought us out of that state of nature, in which we were enemies to God by wicked works, and we are now fighting the battles of the Lord, we shall not "endure hardness," as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, 2 Tim. ii. 3. but as we "pray always and with all prayer, and are watching thereunto with all perseverance."

2. It is of importance that we should regard the manner and spirit in which the scriptures direct us to pray: it is not enough to say or utter words before the Lord, but we must pray in prayer. Wicked men have exercised themselves in outward and external prayer: Balaam prayed, as too many carnal men do, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Numb. xxiii. 10. But such is the arduous nature of this conflict, that to prosecute it with success, requires the combination of all the energies of which the soul is susceptible, which also are communicated by the Holy Spirit through the means of ardent and persevering prayer.

3. What an awful state is yours, who have been induced to commence a life of prayer, either through the pressure of adverse providences, or the temporary alarms of your consciences, and have fallen back again into a state of total indifference and irreligion! These are the persons described by the prophet: "Lord, in trouble
" have

“ have they visited thee, they poured out a
 “ prayer when thy chastening was upon them.”
 Isa. xxvi. 16. Ah, thoughtless sinner ! thou wilt
 be in trouble again, and then with what face
 wilt thou return to a throne of grace, and pray
 to that God whom thou hast despised, and uni-
 formly disobeyed in the days of thy prosperity ?
 How justly may the Lord address you, as he ad-
 dressed his ancient people the Jews ! “ Where
 “ are thy gods that thou hast made thee ? let
 “ them arise if they can save thee in the time of
 “ thy trouble.” Jer. ii. 28.

4. Our last reflection is for the comfort and
 encouragement of God’s praying people. You
 feel the vast importance of a life of prayer ; you
 desire to pray according to the apostolic direction :
 your soul’s desire is to be always praying, and to
 be always alive to God in the exercise ; but you
 are repeatedly constrained to say with the apostle,
 “ For to will is present with me, but how to
 “ perform that which is good I find not.” Rom.
 vii. 18. Darkness, deadness, and distraction
 in prayer, are so frequent and so great, that you
 are tempted to give over praying, as useless and
 unprofitable. Encourage not such unbelieving
 thoughts as these : keep on in the holy exercise :
 exemplify that sentence, “ faint, yet pursuing.”
 Let thy soul be animated with the pleasing
 thought, that Christ prays for thee, and the Holy
 Spirit

Spirit makes intercession within thee. Through all the changes of the Christian life, be this thy constant practice, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." Amen.

SER-

S E R M O N I I I .

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ASSISTANCE IN
PRAYER.

ROMANS, viii. 26.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

THE eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans contains a concise and beautiful epitome of the Christian religion, and has not only been held in high estimation by the Christian church, ever since it was written, but has, under the divine blessing, been the instrument of increasing its real edification.

Here we find a faithful and humbling delineation of man's guilty, miserable, and helpless condition by nature: he is "carnally minded," ver. 6.; all the thoughts and affections of his soul have an earthly and sensual bias, minding only the
F
things

things of time and sense: hence every natural man walks after the example of the Jews, of whom the Lord thus speaks: "They have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns which can hold no water." Jer. ii. 13. This temper of mind proves him void of every principle of spiritual life, and exposes him finally to eternal death, which is emphatically styled, in the book of the Revelations, "the second death."

He is not only at an awful distance from God, the source of all true felicity, and has none of those devout affections towards him which characterize the true Christian, but his mind is "enmity against God," ver. 7. His soul rises up in rebellion against Jehovah's perfections and government, trampling both the law and the gospel under his feet, and avowing his friendship with the world, the flesh, and Satan, the known and inveterate enemies of all truth and righteousness. It necessarily follows, that whilst he is in this state, he is "in the flesh," and "cannot please God," ver. 8.

In this part of the sacred volume we have also a full and pleasing description of the way by which man is restored to the friendship, likeness, and enjoyment of God. It is by a medium quite contrary to the proud reasoning and self-righteousness of the human heart; "for what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the
"flesh,

“ flesh, God sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit,” ver. 3, 4. In this passage the apostle gives an explicit and strong representation of the atonement of Christ, by which alone the sinner can be released from the penalty of the holy law of God, constituted righteous in his sight, and ultimately brought to eternal glory.

This chapter also contains a delightful and animating view of the blessedness which attaches to those who are redeemed by Jesus Christ: “There is now, therefore, no condemnation to them,” ver. 1.; they are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ,” ver. 17.; “all things,” even the darkest, the most trying, and the most alarming providences, all “work together for good,” ver. 28. They are privileged to say, “If God be for us, who shall be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” ver. 31, 32. All the accusations and opposition of their enemies, however secret and formidable, shall be rendered abortive; for “who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the

“ right hand of God, who also maketh inter-
 “ cession for us,” ver. 33, 34. To crown all, and
 shew the completeness of the believer’s felicity in
 this life, and the certainty of eternal life in the
 world to come, the apostle finishes his description
 with this sublime exultation : “ For I am per-
 “ suaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels,
 “ nor principalities, nor powers, nor things pre-
 “ sent, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth,
 “ nor any other creature, shall be able to separate
 “ us from the love of God which is in Christ
 “ Jesus our Lord,” ver. 38, 39.

Again : We are here presented with the plainest
 and most ordinary evidences of having interest
 in all this blessedness, and thereby the Christian
 is assisted to form a decisive judgment upon his
 own character and state. If we are thus privi-
 leged, we “ walk not after the flesh, but after the
 “ Spirit,” ver. 1. ; we are “ spiritually minded,”
 ver. 6. ; the Holy Spirit dwells in and leads us,
 ver. 9. 14. ; and we are “ conformed to the image
 “ of Christ,” ver. 29. : there will, in fact, be a
 total change in us, and as we have borne “ the
 “ image of the earthy,” we shall now bear “ the
 “ image of the heavenly.” 1 Cor. xv. 49.

Lastly, to take away all glorying in what we
 have attained to in the Christian life, and to en-
 courage us in the expectation of all we need in
 time to come, the apostle frequently speaks of the
 Holy Ghost as the agent, by whom all the great
 branches

branches of the gospel are revealed to the understanding, and applied to the conscience, and who assists the Christian in all his devotional exercises. The agency of the Spirit, which is so strongly maintained in this chapter, is one of its most important parts, because without this the human mind cannot be brought to a saving acquaintance with religion. Our understandings are too dark to perceive its excellencies, too hard to feel its importance, and too carnal and sensual to embrace either the doctrines or the precepts of a religion so spiritual and holy, and which makes so little provision for the flesh : and even when the mind has felt the Spirit's power, working a change in all these respects, it needs the same agency to maintain the good work which is begun, especially to keep it alive and constant in its intercourse with God at a throne of grace. The Holy Spirit's assistance in prayer is now the subject of our attention, and to this the words of our text evidently refer ; in discoursing upon which I shall,

First, Offer some general remarks.

Secondly, Shew the necessity of the Holy Spirit's help in prayer.

Thirdly, Speak of the nature and extent of that help which praying persons derive from him.

First, Offer some general remarks.

1. The Holy Spirit's assistance in prayer is not one of those subjects at which the scriptures

merely glance, but it is frequently mentioned both in the Old and New Testament. In the former of these it is the subject of prophecy and promise : " I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication." Zech. xii. 10. Some interpret this text as having immediate reference to the day of Pentecost, which is also predicted by another of the prophets in these words : " I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh." Joel, ii. 28. The exact fulfilment of this scripture is thus affirmed by the apostle Peter, when he is explaining and vindicating the great event alluded to : " They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Acts, ii. 4. " This is that," says the apostle, " which was spoken by the prophet Joel," ver. 16. Nor is this opinion improbable, if we compare the latter part of the verse with the immediate effect of Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost. " They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." Zech. xii. 10. Before Peter had ended the sermon, which he preached to explain and vindicate the descent of the Holy Ghost, a multitude were brought to feel their guilt and misery, and cry out, under the influence of the Spirit,

Spirit, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Acts, ii. 37. The Spirit was eminently in them as a spirit of "grace and supplication;" and he is thus in all the true children of God, in every age and in every place.

In the New Testament, the doctrine of the Spirit's help in prayer is taught both in a way of exhortation and encouragement. In Eph. vi. 18. the apostle exhorts the Christians at Ephesus to be "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit;" and Jude gave this exhortation to them to whom he wrote: "Building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost," ver. 20. And in the words of my text, the apostle Paul endeavours to comfort the believing Romans, under all their sense of insufficiency in prayer, with this pleasing truth, that "the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities. The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

The accomplishment of the promise of having the Holy Spirit as a spirit of "grace and supplication," is made sure to the disciples of Christ by the description which our Lord gives of Him, who is the dispenser of this rich blessing; "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Luke, xi. 13.

2. The Holy Spirit's helping of the infirmities of the saints is not a casual or uncertain thing, for it is a work to which he is in an especial manner appointed. In the verse which follows my text, he is said to make intercession for us "according to the will of God," which Dr. Doddridge paraphrases thus: "He manages affairs for the saints according to the gracious will and appointment of God." In the grand economy of man's salvation, in which the church is said to be "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus," 1 Pet. i. 2. it is his stipulated work not only to enlighten, sanctify, and comfort the children of God, but also so to instruct and assist them continually in all the branches of religious worship, as shall render it acceptable to God and profitable to themselves.

3. The Spirit on whom Christians are taught to depend for assistance in all their devotional exercises, especially in prayer, is abundantly well qualified for his office: he is thus described in one scripture: "The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God; for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." 1 Cor. ii. 11. Happy is that man, who, conscious of his own ignorance and weakness, renounces

renounces all self-confidence, and relies on the promised aid of this intelligent and omnipotent agent.

4. The Holy Spirit's assistance is afforded in such a manner, as not always to be very perceptible to the Christian himself. He does not always descend upon or aid his people, as on the day of Pentecost, with "a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind," Acts, ii. 2.; but rather his agency resembles the soft and gentle southern gales, which, whilst they are scarcely felt, both refresh and invigorate. He comes to the help of his saints, not so much in "the earthquake" as in "the still small voice." 1 Kings, xix. 11, 12. Hence it is that those prayers of ours, of which we think the least, and reckon only as the chattering of "the crane or the swallow," Isa. xxxviii. 14. because they have been poured out from minds abased, agitated, and discouraged, have been more acceptable to and prevalent with God, than those prayers which, however far superior in the elegance of their composition, or the pathetic manner in which they are uttered, arise not from a broken heart, or out of true poverty of spirit, consequently cannot be the production of the gracious Spirit.

5. But for the agency of the Holy Spirit, many of us had long since given over prayer: we have experienced so much darkness, coldness, and interruption in this holy service, and our unbelieving hearts

hearts have been too often ready to listen to the temptations of Satan, and conclude, that a life of holy and humble prayer to God is both impracticable and unprofitable; but he has enabled us to hope even against hope, otherwise we should have fainted. When we have concluded every thing was against us, and been just ready to give up all for lost, saying, Why should we wait for the Lord any longer? He has invigorated our languid faith, and enabled us to take up the determination of the prophet, "I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me." Micah, vii. 7. I proceed,

Secondly, To shew the necessity of the Holy Spirit's assistance in prayer. A point of doctrine this, which applies equally to all periods of the church's history, and to the strong as well as to the weak believer.

The necessity of the Spirit's assistance in prayer may be urged upon a great variety of grounds; but I shall confine myself chiefly to that which arises from the words of my text. The apostle there speaks of the believer's "infirmities;" and these are so very numerous, they are so vigorous and active, and they are so constantly with and round about us, that, were it not for the help of the Spirit, they would not only frequently interrupt and hinder us in the exercise of prayer, but they would oblige us to abandon it altogether. This word

word (infirmity) has a variety of significations attached to it in scripture, and in every one of them we shall find some proof of the proposition we are now discussing, that the assistance of the Holy Spirit in prayer is necessary. We do not mean to say, that it is necessary to the utterance of certain words: the most carnal and wicked man may repeat prayers, either written or extempore, without the help of God's Spirit; but the spirit of the position goes to this fact, that we cannot pray to God scripturally, spiritually, or experimentally, we cannot pray to God so as to be accepted of God, and to obtain a gracious answer from God, without the aid of this Spirit. It is not enough with the good man, that he has said a prayer, and so discharged a duty; but his prayer is invariably followed by an anxious desire that it may be favourably received: his views and feelings are similar to those of the Psalmist, "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice," Psa. cxli. 2.—that is, that it may be pleasing to God, and graciously received by him.

The infirmities of good men may be arranged under the following particulars—their frailty, their afflictions, their weakness, and their sinful imperfections.

1. A Christian has infirmity, as he is a frail and mortal creature. It was in allusion to this, that Paul and Barnabas said to the heathens, who would

would have rendered divine honours to them, "We also are men of like passions with you." Acts, xiv. 15. As much as if they had said, We are not deities, we have no claim to divine worship, we are mere mortals, and as liable to disease and death as you are. Paul, speaking to Timothy, gives him this advice, "Use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." 1 Tim. v. 23. The apostle here speaks of those bodily infirmities to which the frail creature man is subject: these are so great, and a strong sense of them is so discouraging, that we should be overpowered when we draw nigh to God, did not the Holy Spirit afford us his aid.

2. A Christian is the subject of infirmity, as he is liable to affliction and temptation. The apostle, detailing some parts of his own experience, says, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake." 2 Cor. xii. 10. Though he triumphed over all these trials and temptations by the power of faith, yet in the experience of weaker Christians they not unfrequently obstruct and discourage in prayer.

3. By infirmities, is sometimes intended those weaknesses and defects which attach principally to an infantile state of grace. In an immediate reference to this it is said, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." Rom. xv. 1. In the weak believer there

there is much remaining ignorance, unbelief, and fear; and these will hinder his approach to God in prayer, or make it unprofitable, unless the Spirit become his helper. He is so sensible of this, that he could not encourage himself in prayer but for this text: he indeed often feels the truth of the following lines:

—O sad estate

Of human wretchedness! So weak is man,
So ignorant, and blind, that did not God
Sometimes withhold in mercy what we ask,
We should be ruin'd at our own request.

4. By infirmities, is sometimes meant those sinful propensities which remain even in the children of God: their hearts too often resemble a cage of unclean birds: here pride, and envy, and lust, and covetousness, lift up their heads, and strive to regain the throne of the heart. By their incessant strivings they sometimes keep the Christian from a throne of grace, and at other times they fill him with such shame, confusion, and distress, that he has neither faith to believe that God will hear him, nor any pleasure in the holy exercise, unless the Spirit help his infirmities, and make intercession for him with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Amidst all these infirmities, under which the saints groan, being burdened, and which may all be alluded to in the words of the text, as they all have a tendency to discourage and hinder us in prayer, what a rich source of encouragement

is there for us in the scriptures, which assure us that "we have not an High-priest which cannot "be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, "but was in all points tempted like as we are, "yet without sin," Heb. iv. 15.; and that "the "Spirit also helpeth our infirmities." Let us not then be backward to prayer; let us not be disheartened by the ignorance and weakness we find in ourselves: the knowledge and feeling of these things are needful and profitable, as they make us perceive our need of the Holy Spirit's assistance; as they convince us of our own insufficiency, and make us more apt to learn that humbling but important truth, "It is God which worketh in you "both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Phil. ii. 13. I come now,

Thirdly, To speak of the nature and extent of that help which the Spirit affords the believer in prayer. This branch of the subject is as extensive as it is important, embracing all that is needful to give the soul a free and powerful utterance in its converse with God.

1. The Spirit may be said to help us in prayer, as he gives us a spirit of prayer, and excites us to the constant practice of this duty. Dr. Manton, on James, v. 16. says, the term rendered *effectual fervent prayer* "properly signifies a prayer wrought "and excited, and so implies both the efficacy "and influence of the Holy Ghost, and the "force and vehemence of an earnest spirit." All true

true prayer is wrought and excited in the soul by the Holy Ghost, and until he begin to work, the soul never will pray in spirit and in truth.

The soul is never excited to true prayer until it discovers the holiness of God, the spirituality of the law, and the heinousness of sin; of all sin, whether it be in thought, or in word, or in deed; whether it be in the omission of duty, or in the commission of evil: and thus to discover and impress the evil of sin upon the conscience, is the work of God's Spirit, as appears by the words of our Lord: "When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin." John, xvi. 9.

The soul must not only see the evil of sin, but it must also feel its own weakness and inability, either to make any satisfaction to God for the offences committed in time past, or to do that which is right in time to come. This also is the work of God's Holy Spirit; and this accomplished, the sinner will pray to God for the forgiveness of his transgression, and for strength to do his holy will.

He excites the Christian to pray also, by opening his mind to an acquaintance with the promises and blessings revealed in the holy scriptures: he no sooner affords him a glimpse of these, than his soul thirsts after larger discoveries of them, and his language is that of David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. Give me understanding, that I may

"I may know thy testimonies." Psa. cxix. 18.
 125. This is especially the case, when the soul is brought to see the suitableness and excellency of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself said of this Spirit, "He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." John, xvi. 14. And when he discovers to the mind the glory of the Redeemer's person, the efficacy of his blood, and the fulness of his grace, and withal makes it evident, that the vilest, the weakest, and the most miserable of sinners, may partake of these glorious things, such an one cannot be content with praying that he may have an interest in them, but he prays also that he may have the evidence and comfort of their being his, brought home to his soul by the faith of assurance, enabling him to say of Christ, "Who loved me, and gave himself for me." Gal. ii. 20.

Thus prayer is excited in the soul through the operations of the Holy Spirit, who enlightens the eyes of the understanding, awakens the soul to feel its misery, and reveals Christ as a suitable, willing, and all-sufficient Saviour. And if at any time the soul *restrains prayer*, by falling into a backsliding state, or becomes dead and lifeless in the exercise thereof, it is alone by the Spirit's help that it is restored to a life of prayer, or kept spiritual, humble, and holy, in the continuance of it.

2. The Spirit helps our infirmities in prayer, by teaching us *how* to pray. Under this branch of the

the subject I shall speak of the persons for whom, and the blessings for which we should pray, together with the manner in which prayer is performed when the Spirit helps our infirmities. It will not be irrelevant to this part of the subject to remark, that the Spirit, in teaching us to pray, never acts in contradiction to the word of God. This is the grand directory for the church, both as to the matter and manner of prayer: all that is necessary for us to know upon the subject is there placed before us, both in precept and example: we have some of those very prayers which were uttered before the footstool of the throne of mercy by the patriarchs, the prophets, and the apostles; yea, by Jesus Christ himself, who received the Holy Spirit in all his gifts and operations without measure. Here we can find patterns for every kind of prayer, suited to all the complicated trials we may have to bear and suffer, and all the important duties we may be called to perform; suited also to all ordinances, seasons, and providences. But sufficient and complete as the divine volume is to answer all our inquiries about prayer, it is to the Holy Spirit that we must be indebted for the proper use and application of all the knowledge with which it furnishes us upon this interesting topic: it is he that supplies the praying soul with a quick and clear perception, strong and energetic feelings, a ready utterance, and an humble confidence in God.

1. In teaching us how to pray, the Spirit will certainly guide us as to the persons for *whom* we should pray. As the scriptures furnish us neither with precept nor example in regard to praying for the fallen angels, or the deceased part of the human race, neither will the Spirit ever lead the saints to such kind of prayers, which are a part of will-worship, the observers whereof appear to say, that they are wiser and more benevolent than their Maker. Of the first class of persons for whom we are not to pray, it is said, "The angels
 " which kept not their first estate, but left their
 " own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting
 " chains under darkness unto the judgment of
 " the great day." Jude, 6. Of the second, those who have departed out of this life, and who both lived and died in a state of sin and unbelief, our Lord himself speaks thus: "Where
 " their worm dieth not, and the fire is not
 " quenched." Mark, ix. 44. The persons for whom we shall be led to pray, if we follow the scripture rule, and are helped in prayer by the Holy Spirit, are only sinners of the human race, who are yet within the reach of mercy, and may be said to stand on praying ground. Here I might speak of praying not only for ourselves, but also for our families, our churches, our country, and for sinners of every language and country, yea, even for our most inveterate enemies. But as these topics will come more fully into view in
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another part of this subject, I shall pass them over now, and speak,

2. Of the Spirit's teaching us *what* to pray for. It will be in this case the same as in the preceding; the Spirit will act in harmony with the word: he will consequently teach us to pray for those blessings which are the subjects of promise. These are of three kinds—temporal, spiritual, and eternal.

It has been doubted by some, whether temporal blessings should be the subject of prayer; but this is as unreasonable as it is unscriptural. "Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights," James, i. 17. : he is the sole proprietor of all earthly good; the cattle upon a thousand hills, and the gold and the silver, are *all his*, and are distributed among men in that proportion, and in that way, which seemeth good in *his* sight. Temporal blessings are the subject of divine promise; "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." 1 Tim. iv. 8. We are also taught to place our dependance, for the supply of all our temporal wants, upon the love and care of our covenant God, of whom Christ says, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things," Matt. vi. 32.; and how are we to express our dependance upon God for the exercise of this goodness, but by the me-

dium of faith and prayer? Finally, how can we doubt whether we should pray for temporal blessings, when we have so many examples upon record?—Prayers offered up to God expressly for these things, and in the presenting of which we have reason to conclude the Holy Spirit lent his gracious assistance.

It is probable, that Jabez prayed for temporal good, and that he sought the enlargement of his inheritance, and the blessing of God upon the work of his hands, in the following well-known prayer :
 “ Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and
 “ enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be
 “ with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from
 “ evil, that it may not grieve me.” 1 Chron. iv. 10.
 It is certain, that Jacob prayed for temporal blessings, when he expressed his desires to God in the form of a vow in the following words : “ If God
 “ will be with me, and will keep me in this way
 “ that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and
 “ raiment to put on, so that I come again to my
 “ father’s house in peace, then shall the Lord be
 “ my God, and this stone which I have set up for
 “ a pillar shall be God’s house; and of all that
 “ thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth
 “ unto thee.” Gen. xxviii. 20, 21, 22. Agur also sought temporal blessings at the throne of grace, when he said, “ Give me neither poverty nor riches,
 “ feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be
 “ full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?
 “ or

“ or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name
 “ of my God in vain.” Prov. xxx. 8, 9. It is
 worthy of remark, that in all these supplications
 for earthly blessings, the good men who presented
 them are mindful principally of the needful things
 of time, and seem in their prayers to be governed
 by a regard to the glory of God, and the pro-
 sperity of their own souls.

Spiritual blessings are also the proper subject
 of prayer, and Christians will daily want fresh
 supplies of these: their weakness, their trials,
 and their conflicts, are so numerous, that they
 would sink under them but for the succour which
 is daily brought into the soul through the me-
 dium of prayer. They therefore should en-
 courage each other in this holy work in such
 language as this: “ Let us therefore come boldly
 “ unto the throne of grace, that we may ob-
 “ tain mercy and find grace to help in time of
 “ need.” Heb. iv. 16. In Christ all the blessings
 of salvation are treasured up, and out of his ful-
 ness they are communicated to us in a way of
 free and unmerited grace: it is, nevertheless,
 clearly laid down in scripture, that they are to
 be sought in prayer, because God hath said, even
 in regard to those things which he had both de-
 termined and promised to do for his church, “ I
 “ will yet for this be inquired of by the house of
 “ Israel to do it for them.” Ezek. xxxvi. 37.
 There will never be a period on this side the

grave when the real Christian will rise above the need of prayer: as it is among the first, it will also be among the last of the operations of God's Holy Spirit in the soul. Prayer was the first act of grace put forth by the apostle Paul after his conversion, and it was the last act of grace in which the dying martyr Stephen was engaged previous to his entering the world of light and glory. That great Christian never ceased praying until he ceased breathing; he continued the life of prayer until he began the life of glory.

That glory, into which Stephen entered with triumph almost as soon as his prayer, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," Acts, vii. 59. had reached the throne of God, is the subject also of the Christian's prayer. The darkness, the difficulties, and the dangers of the Christian's journey through this dreary and miserable world, often constrain him to direct his eye towards that land of promise, in which the saints shall find the fullest accomplishment of that beautiful passage, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." Rev. xxi. 4. His meditations on this state of blessedness fill him with holy and ardent desires "to depart and to be with Christ," Phil. i. 23. and impress his mind so deeply with a consciousness of the vanity and imperfection of the

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the present life, that he is frequently led to breathe forth his soul in the pathetic exclamation of the Psalmist, "O that I had wings like a dove, for " then would I fly away and be at rest." Psa. lv. 6. It is worthy of remark, that the Holy Spirit not only teaches us to pray for heaven, and helps our infirmities in such prayers, but he bears witness to our souls that we are the heirs of it, and becomes himself the earnest of it in our experience. This is evident by the words of the apostle Paul addressed to the believers at Ephesus: "In whom " ye also trusted after that ye heard the word of " truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom " also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed " with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the " earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption " of the purchased possession, unto the praise of " his glory." Eph. i. 13, 14.

In teaching the Christian how to pray, the Holy Spirit will guide him as to the *manner* and *spirit* in which he should approach God. In accomplishing this, he possesses the mind of the true believer with a holy awe when in the Divine presence, and enables him to recollect and practise what David affirms: "God is greatly to be " feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be " had in reverence of all them that are about " him." Psa. lxxxix. 7. He cannot address the Majesty of heaven in that insolent and contemptuous

temptuous manner which is practised by many self-sufficient and vain-confident professors, who speak to God in prayer as if they were addressing some creature like themselves.

The Spirit also teaches the real believer to be humble in prayer: he fills his mind with such a holy shame for sin, and such a strong impression of his own weakness and insufficiency, as leads him to act in the same manner, shew much the same spirit, and express himself in the same words, as the poor prodigal when he was returning to his father's house.

Again: In conformity to his character as the Spirit of truth, he teaches the saints to pray with unfeigned sincerity: this is highly necessary, because "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." John, iv. 24. Our prayers will be as useless to us as they are offensive to God, if our hearts be not right with him. May each of us be enabled to adopt the words of the Psalmist, "Hear the right, O Lord; attend unto my cry; give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips." Psa. xvii. 1.

They that pray without the guidance of the Spirit, exercise no patience in waiting for the blessing they ask: in them is exemplified the saying of a good man, "they knock at mercy's door, and run away;" but they whose infirmities

ties are helped in the manner spoken of in the text, both expect and wait for the blessing. Of Abraham it is said, "and so after he had patiently endured he obtained the promise," Heb. vi. 15.; and David describes his own experience thus: "I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry." Psa. xl. 1.

When we pray under the guidance of our own judgment, and are influenced only by our own inclinations in prayer, we dictate to God both as to what he must give us, and also the manner and time in which we must have it; but if we are helped of the Spirit, we shall pray with submission to the Divine will. In the example of our Divine Master we have an exemplary pattern: in the immediate prospect of his last conflict he thus prayed: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." Luke, xxii. 42.

Lastly: When the Holy Spirit teaches us how to pray, he influences us to a sincere and unre-served renunciation of our idols. If we approach God with "a divided heart," we shall be "found faulty." Hosea, x. 2. We should often think on the address of the prophet Elijah to the house of Israel: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." May the Spirit ever lead us to cry, "The Lord, he is the God! The Lord,
" he

“ he is the God !” 1 Kings, xviii. 21. 39. ; and make every idol in our heart fall before the throne of grace, as Dagon fell before the ark.

3. The Spirit not only excites the Christian to pray, and teaches him how to do it, but he affords him special and effectual aid in the exercise : and every real believer knows, that without his aid, however well his thoughts may be arranged, and however fluent his lips may be in uttering them, his heart remains dark, confused, and lifeless.

It is by the aid of the Holy Spirit in prayer, that the soul attains a deep sense of the inestimable value of heavenly things, and an ardent desire to possess them. There can be no fervour or energy in prayer, until we feel that the blessings of salvation are infinitely more important than all that this world can afford, either in its wealth, its pleasures, or its honours. But when the Spirit suitably affects the soul with this conviction, then it is induced to plead and wrestle with God as did the patriarch Jacob, of whom it is said, that “ he had power over the angel, and prevailed ; he wept, and made supplication.” Hosea, xii. 4. Then his prayers resemble those of his great High-priest, “ who, in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that is able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.” Heb. v. 7.

It is by the Spirit's aid that we obtain enlargement of heart and liberty of expression in prayer. Our views of God, of his grace, and of his promises, are contracted, until we feel the unction of the Holy Spirit; then we find a sweet and heavenly freedom. It was for something of this kind that David prayed, when he said, "O Lord! open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise." Psa. li. 15. It is peculiarly desirable and pleasant to have the lips and the heart touched in prayer with a live coal from off the altar; then we feel the true blessedness of having access to God, and are enabled, in the spirit of children, to cry, "Abba, Father!" Rom. viii. 15.

It is only as the Spirit affords his special assistance in prayer, that we practise it with pleasure and delight. Christians know, by painful experience, that there are times when, through their many infirmities, the wheels of their souls drag on heavily through this devotional exercise; but if the Spirit shine with his animating and soul-reviving rays, they are all light, life, and pleasure; the soul cries out with Asaph, "It is good for me to draw near to God," Psa. lxxiii. 28.; and with Peter, when on the mount, "Lord! it is good to be here." Matt. xvii. 4. When it is thus with us, we feel a holy ecstasy, a sublime pleasure in our intercourse with our covenant God, which gives us a rich foretaste of that world which is
thus

thus described by a sacred writer: "In thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Psa. xvi. 11.

It is by the agency of the Holy Spirit alone that Christians attain to any composure of mind, or to any devout affections in prayer. Our hearts are not only exposed to the inroad of distracting thoughts, but they are too often interrupted by carnal affections, which impede and embarrass them in their intercourse with Heaven. When thus circumstanced, we expostulate with ourselves, we strive to shake off this miserable frame of soul; but all is in vain; we cannot bring our souls one step nearer to God and heaven, until the Holy Spirit help our infirmities: but when his divine unction is felt, then the chains which bound us to the earth are broken; the tumult which worldly cares had raised in our souls subsides, earthly things cease to attract us, a heavenly calm fills the breast, and a glowing affection towards God elevates the mind, and draws it forth in the most ardent desires after his perfect likeness and vision in glory.

The Holy Spirit's aid is peculiarly needful so to witness with our spirits that we are the children of adoption, that we may approach God with a strong confidence that he will accept us and answer our prayers. The importance of coming to a throne of grace in this frame of mind is obvious from the following exhortation: "Let us draw
" near

“ near with a true heart in full assurance of
 “ faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil
 “ conscience, and our bodies washed with pure
 “ water.” Heb. x. 22. To be enabled to follow
 this direction is a high privilege, and tends to
 enrich the soul with comfort, and to inspire it
 with energy in every religious duty ; but we can-
 not attain to it but by the agency of the good Spi-
 rit of God.

To conclude : The Holy Spirit so helps the in-
 firmities of the saints in prayer, by his unction
 and power, that the sighs and groans which pro-
 ceed from them, when agonizing with God in
 prayer, are spoken of, in the text, as his : “ The
 “ Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with
 “ groanings which cannot be uttered.” There
 is nothing in this idea of the apostle which either
 tends to supersede the necessity of Christ’s inter-
 cession, or weaken the believer’s attachment to it ;
 for he knows that, while all the operations of the
 Spirit in him, in regard to prayer, relate either to
 the exciting of his soul to this duty, to the impress-
 ing it with suitable thoughts, or to the producing
 in it a divine liberty and energy, whilst those
 thoughts are expressed in words ; the intercession
 of Christ goes immediately to the acceptance of
 them before God. It is thus described by one :

The Christian’s heart his prayer indites,
 He speaks as prompted from within ;
 The Spirit his petition writes,
 And Christ the Saviour gives it in.

I shall

I shall conclude with remarking,

1. That professing Christians should be very careful that they do not mistake the fancies and delusions of their own hearts for the influences of the Holy Spirit : strong effects have often been produced upon the natural passions in devotional exercises, when there has been no unction from the Holy Spirit. Errors on this subject are frequent, and prove derogatory to the honour of the gospel and the glory of the Redeemer. If the Spirit really makes intercession within us, we shall feel a holy awe of the Majesty of God, we shall feel a strong hatred to sin, together with an increasing measure of grace and holiness.

2. Let us be constant and diligent in the use of all the means of grace. To suspend a regular attention to these, under pretence of waiting for the motions of the Holy Spirit to excite us to, and aid us in spiritual services, is unscriptural and enthusiastic. This remark may be illustrated by the case of Daniel, to whom an angel (perhaps the angel of the covenant) thus spake : " Fear not, Daniel ; for from the first
 " day that thou didst set thine heart to under-
 " stand and to chasten thyself before thy God,
 " thy words were heard, and I am come for thy
 " words. Now I am come to make thee under-
 " stand what shall befall thy people in the latter
 " days, for yet the vision is for many days." Dan. x. 12. 14. This good man did not decline

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an inquiry into the nature and importance of the prophecies that had been delivered to him until he had some special communication from Heaven; but he applied himself to the ordinary means, with a dependance, no doubt, upon the Divine assistance; and scarcely had he begun the arduous but pleasing employment, before the angel of the Lord is sent to afford the most ample and satisfactory interpretation. In like manner, let us be found occupied in the regular seasons of prayer, and we shall find that God will send his Holy Spirit to help our infirmities.

3. Let us deprecate formal and lifeless prayer: there is too much of this already in the professing world; the reason is plain: the Holy Spirit, upon whose assistance in prayer we have been discoursing, is not only slighted as unnecessary in the churches, but the doctrine is ridiculed as fanciful and enthusiastic. But real Christians know, that there is neither liberty, energy, or acceptance in prayer, except the Holy Spirit help our infirmities; and, consequently, they account it among the most important parts of experimental religion.

4. If the Spirit's helping our infirmities be so important a branch of religion, and so conducive to our growth in grace and the maintenance of the true spirit of prayer, how careful should we be to shun grieving or offending him! "Quench not the Spirit," 1 Thess. v. 19. is an apostolic

exhortation. From his divine unction, as from a fire, we derive all our spiritual warmth and animation, and therefore should continually use the language of David in prayer, "Take not thy "Holy Spirit from me," Psa. li. 11.; and if we would not have him depart from us, and leave our souls in a dead, wintry state, we must neither undervalue or slight his agency, nor vex or rebel against him by the indulgence of sin; no, not so much as the smallest darling or besetting sin.

May the Lord command his blessing upon what has now been said. Amen.

S E R M O N IV.

PUBLIC PRAYER.

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 I KINGS, viii. 59.

*And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God, day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require.*

**N**OTWITHSTANDING those sacred books which were written previous to the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh, were written in the infancy of the church, yet they abound with interesting and instructive passages, calculated, with the Divine blessing, to increase our knowledge and inflame our devotion. There are few if any chapters in the Old Testament more suited to promote these objects, than that from which I have read my text, containing the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple, one of



the most spacious and splendid monuments the art and labour of man ever produced. This noble building, in the erection of which the king of Israel spared neither cost nor labour, was designed to be a type and figure of that glorious church which Jesus, the true Solomon, the king of peace, was appointed to raise out of the ruins of our fallen world, and of which the prophet thus speaks: "Behold the man whose name is  
 " the branch! and he shall grow up out of his  
 " place, and he shall build the temple of the  
 " Lord. Even he shall build the temple of the  
 " Lord, and he shall bear the glory: and shall  
 " sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be  
 " a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of  
 " peace shall be between them both." Zech.  
 vi. 12, 13.

In past times the Lord had a tabernacle among his people, in which was placed the ark of the covenant, which ark was a symbol of Jehovah's presence with his people. To this tabernacle the tribes of Israel were accustomed to draw near, and there offer, upon God's altar, both bloody sacrifices and devout supplications. It was reserved for David, the man after God's own heart, to purpose, plan, and diligently prepare to build a magnificent house, for the worship of the one living and true God. The way in which his mind was first impressed upon the subject, and what God said to him concerning it, are related

in the following verses: " Now it came to pass,  
 " as David sat in his house, that David said to  
 " Nathan the prophet, Lo! I dwell in an house  
 " of cedars, but the ark of the covenant of the  
 " Lord remaineth under curtains. Then Nathan  
 " said unto David, Do all that is in thine heart,  
 " for God is with thee. And it came to pass the  
 " same night, that the word of God came to  
 " Nathan, saying, Go, and tell David my ser-  
 " vant,—Thus saith the Lord,—Thou shalt not  
 " build me an house to dwell in. And it shall  
 " come to pass, when thy days be expired, that  
 " thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I  
 " will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be  
 " of thy sons; and I will establish his king-  
 " dom. He shall build me an house, and I will  
 " establish his throne for ever." 1 Chron. xvii.

1, 2, 3, 4. 11, 12.

No sooner is David gone to his fathers in peace, than Solomon hastens to fulfil the favourite design of his father; and puts his hand to the work with a zeal which proves that his whole soul is in it. And it was a pleasing circumstance, that thousands, yea, tens of thousands of his subjects, whose hearts were right with God, were made willing-hearted, and seconded his views in hastening the completion of this great and good work.

The very liberal contributions which had been made in the days of his father greatly facilitated this arduous and honourable undertaking, and

by the good providence of God, after a period of seven years, was the house of the Lord finished. To all those Israelites who loved the altar and tabernacle of God, this was an event to which their hopes and prayers had frequently been directed. They had watched the progress of the work, and with anxious solicitude had often inquired after the period when it was probable it might arrive at perfection. The joyful day at length came, and the thousands of Israel, with cheerful hearts, hastened from all parts of the kingdom to witness the public and solemn dedication of the temple to God.

What an interesting spectacle does the congregation of Israel present, upon this truly memorable occasion! Solomon, their king, is not content with being a spectator and witness of the solemnities of this high and holy day, but he takes an active part in them: laying aside the insignia of his office, and almost forgetting he is the king of this people, he endeavours to lead their devotions; he becomes a mouth to God for them, and in the most elevated and devotional strain pours out his soul to God for himself and his people in humble and importunate prayer. When looking for a text on which to ground some reflections upon public prayer, no scripture presented itself to my recollection, in all respects, better suited to my purpose, than this devout, and, in every respect, truly

admirable prayer of Solomon, from which I intend to draw some general observations.

*Obj. I. Public Prayer* is both an ancient and important branch of divine worship. It was a part of the patriarchal worship: it was so even among that generation to whom God at first revealed himself as a God of grace through the seed of the woman, who was to "bruise the serpent's head." Gen. iii. 15. It was indeed but a short time after the Messiah had been thus promised to Adam, that men found it both a duty and a pleasure to associate for public devotion, as appears by the following text: "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord," Gen. iv. 26. which the Assembly of Divines paraphrases thus: "Then God moved men's hearts more sincerely to separate from the profane society of the wicked (such as were the posterity of Cain), to serve God, not as before, in private families only, but in more public societies, and that in a more solemn manner, and with more zeal and boldness than in former times."

Public prayer was a part of the worship which God instituted among the Jews in the wilderness, and was offered at the door of the tabernacle, before that propitiatory, which was a beautiful type of Jesus Christ, who is said to be "the propitiation for our sins," 1 John, ii. 2.; and by whom alone we have freedom of access to God at a throne of grace. Nor are we at a loss



for the precise period when the whole congregation used to occupy themselves in this holy practice; for while Zacharias was engaged in his priestly work within the temple, it is said, that "the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense." Luke, i. 10. It would have been highly criminal in them to have neglected the assembling of themselves together at the place where God had recorded his holy name, after he had solemnly declared, "There I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory." Exod. xxix. 43. It is from the circumstance of the congregation of Israel's having fellowship with God in prayer, that Moses congratulates them upon their superiority over all other nations: "For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?" Deut. iv. 7.

I hardly need remind you, that it was a part of the temple service. From this interesting part of religion the temple was denominated "a house of prayer." Isa. lvi. 7. Here, as soon as the congregation were assembled, and the priests had brought up the ark of the Lord into its place, Solomon became a mouth for Israel to God, and mightily did the Spirit of prayer rest upon him, when, in the words of my text, he pleaded with God, and said, "And let these my words,

“ words, wherewith I have made supplication  
 “ before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our  
 “ God, day and night, that he maintain the  
 “ cause of his servant, and the cause of his people  
 “ Israel at all times, as the matter shall require.”

In the very worst days of the Jewish church, when Judah and Israel had both awfully departed from God in heart, in life, and in worship, and corrupted themselves by the grossest idolatry, they still regarded the forms of worship handed down to them by their fathers. They still paid some respect to the instituted service of God, and called upon his holy name in prayer; which made the prophet address them thus in the name of the Lord: “ The new moons and sabbaths, the  
 “ calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it  
 “ is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your  
 “ new moons, and your appointed feasts, my  
 “ soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me, I am  
 “ weary to bear them; and when ye spread forth  
 “ your hands I will hide mine eyes from you:  
 “ yea, when ye make many prayers I will not  
 “ hear: your hands are full of blood,” Isa. i. 13, 14, 15.

We have another proof of this remark in the following words, which may allude not only to the usual and stated services of the sanctuary, but also to their extraordinary seasons of fasting and prayer: “ Yet they seek me daily, and delight to  
 “ know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God.

“ They ask of me the ordinances of justice, they  
 “ take delight in approaching to God : Where-  
 “ fore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest  
 “ not ? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul,  
 “ and thou takest no knowledge ? ” Isa. lviii. 2, 3.  
 Thus we perceive they kept up public devotions,  
 and especially prayer, even when they were to-  
 tally estranged from the purity and power of true  
 religion.

Jesus Christ recommended public prayer in the  
 church, both by his example and instructions :  
 he did the former, when, after his farewell sermon,  
 contained in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth  
 chapters of the gospel of John, he concluded  
 with a most devout and heavenly prayer for the  
 safety, unity, and prosperity of his church, which  
 is given at full length in John, xvii. ; and he did  
 the latter in that encouraging promise, “ For  
 “ where two or three are gathered together in  
 “ my name, there am I in the midst of them.”  
 Matt. xviii. 20. And the disciples attended both  
 to the letter and spirit of their Master's direction ;  
 for when he was taken from them they were  
 much in prayer themselves, and also initiated  
 those whom the Lord called by their ministry into  
 the same practice, as appears by Acts, ii. 41, 42.  
 “ And the same day there were added unto  
 “ them about three thousand souls ; and they  
 “ continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine  
 “ and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and  
 “ in prayer.”

Finally :

Finally : Public prayer is a reasonable, a scriptural, and a profitable service ; since in the place and among the people where the holy incense of prayer is offered upon Jehovah's altar, he hath said, " I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." Exod. xx. 24. It is there that he gives the most pleasing and delightful manifestations of himself to his people. This accounts for the ardent language of David, when for a season he was precluded attendance upon the worship of God's house : " O God ! thou art my God ; early will I seek thee ; my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is ; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." Psa. lxxiii. 1, 2. He expresses himself in like manner upon public prayer in the following passage : " One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after ; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to *inquire* in his temple." Psa. xxvii. 4. Seasons of public prayer must ever be precious to the godly man, if he believes the declaration of the same writer, when he says, " Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts ; we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple." Psa. lxxv. 4.

Admit-



Admitting public prayer to be an essential and important part of divine worship, in the discharge of this duty we must not be governed by our own fancy, inclination, and prejudice, but by the word of God, which will furnish us with some of the most beautiful examples, suited to guide us in regard to the matter of which public prayer should be composed, and the spirit and manner in which it should be presented unto the Lord. Among these, the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple, and the prayer of our Lord for the church, recorded in the gospel of John, are doubtless the most pleasing and interesting specimens.

*Obs. II.* There is reason to think, that when Solomon put up this solemn prayer to God, the whole congregation of Israel were assembled together. The design of this observation is to reprove that evil, but too prevalent practice, of either coming after the prayer is over, or whilst it is offering, to the great interruption of the devotion of others. Late attendance upon public worship is now become so far a matter of custom, that some hearers are never at the first prayer; and the frequency and extent of this indecent behaviour towards God and the ordinances of his house, has taken away, in too many, all consciousness of its evil, and all sense of shame, on account of it, although they are daily offenders in this matter.

But

But it is surely a great evil, and ministers ought, in the most plain and affectionate manner, to remonstrate against it, and never cease reproving for it, till they have brought their hearers to a renunciation of the practice.

The coming into the house of God either in or after the time of prayer, indicates something wrong in the temper and conduct of professing Christians. It should seem, that their hearts are not duly apprised of the excellency and importance of the privilege about to be enjoyed, and therefore have no hunger or thirst for it. When the mind of the good man is rightly disposed towards the house and worship of God, his language will be that of David: "My soul longeth, "yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; "my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living "God." Psa. lxxxiv. 2. The time of returning to the place where the Lord has manifested his glory, and dispensed his grace to the soul, will be anticipated with pleasure, and the hours of delay be counted almost with impatience. A late attendance upon public worship indicates a jumbling and confounding of the duties of religion together. When, on a Lord's day morning, I perceive a professor come running into the house of God, either in the middle of prayer, or when it is quite over, I suspect, not only that it has been a morning of such hurry with him, that his closet and family devotions have been confused,

and

and performed in a hasty, careless, and negligent manner; but I sometimes fear they must have been altogether omitted. Remember, Christian, that this is the established law of the house of God, "Let all things be done decently and in order." 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

It shews also a contempt for some important branches of divine worship. These persons seem to say, that prayer and praise are of no importance in the service of God. It is almost proverbial with some, "We shall be time enough for the sermon;" but such are frequently too late even for that. O! let us remember, that God not only commands us to worship him in the assembly of his saints, but that he carefully inspects the manner and temper of mind in which we do it.

A late attendance upon public worship not only intimates something wrong in the person's own mind, but it is followed with many evident and manifest evils: it must necessarily interrupt the officiating minister, whose mind should be composed and steadily fixed upon the work in which he is engaged: it is an interruption to the congregation at large, whose eyes and ears must needs influence their hearts, while the former are attracted by the persons coming in, and the latter incessantly assailed with the noise of pew-doors and pattens. Our outward senses are inlets to the soul; and when these are attracted, in the house  
of

of God, by new objects, they open the heart to every intruder, and render our sacrifices accessible to every bird of prey.

What a serious injury is done by a late attendance on public worship, to those who are deputed to seat the congregation! These can attend to neither hymns nor prayers, and but very little to the sermon, as some intruder is rushing in every moment to disturb their devotion; and however others may have been edified and comforted, it is next to an impossibility for them to attend either to prayer or preaching.

The person to whom this reproof is directed must sustain an injury in his own soul. If he has not lost that part of the service which, perhaps, was most suitable to his case, and might have brought the greatest blessing, it is probable he has received the word among thorns, which have effectually choked it.

It is a question of no small importance, how such an evil as that we are now complaining of (the neglect or interruption of public prayer), and which pervades all our churches, may be remedied? I shall suggest two or three things which I think conducive to this desirable end.

Let ministers themselves go before their flocks, as patterns of regular and early attendance. Uncertainty in the time of beginning religious worship supplies the hearer with an apology for the irregularities of his attendance.

Let



Let no part of the proper work of the six days be adjourned till the seventh: to say that the hair-dresser was not punctual to his time, is producing no apology for your late attendance: it rather serves to shew, that you have not that holy veneration for the Lord's day that a Christian ought to have; and that you are more solicitous about the outward adorning of your person, than you are to obtain a heavenly and devotional frame of mind, without which sabbaths become a weariness.

We should recollect both the importance and the uncertainty of those privileges we are going to enjoy. Who can tell, when he goes up to mingle his prayers and praises with the congregation of the righteous, that he shall not take his farewell of them? Let us learn to think every Lord's day our last, and attend to the duties thereof with a spirit proportionably serious and devotional.

We ought to remember also, that we are going to meet God, and that he is waiting, that he may be gracious to and bless us. We do not easily bring our minds to treat a fellow-creature as we treat God; for if any unforeseen event should lead us to exceed the time fixed for meeting, whether it relate to business or friendship, we apologize and express concern; but those who habituate themselves to a late attendance on religious worship, seem to feel no sense of impropriety, nor any anxiety to amend their error.

We

We should call to mind the manner in which we used to serve the world and sin. When we worshipped the idol of Pleasure, her temples were frequented at an early hour, and we were among the foremost visitors who paid her homage in the ball-room and the theatre. And having now renounced the hidden things of dishonesty; having, in our profession, renounced the world, shall we serve God with less zeal than we formerly served the world and sin? God forbid!

Lastly: Let us habituate ourselves to rise earlier on the Lord's day than on any other day in the week: we have more important concerns to attend on that day than any other. Indolence and sloth are always criminal, especially in professors of religion; but they are doubly so on that day, every moment of which should be sacred to God and devotion; that day on which our souls should be all activity and zeal. When Abraham had an important service to perform at the command of God, we read that he "rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up and went into the place of which God had told him." Gen. xxii. 3. There was nothing in the service to which Abraham was now going, to allure or entice him to be unusually active; no, it was a service repugnant to nature, and against which reason and unbelief could offer

offer a thousand objections: but he is prompted by a sense of duty to God, and a strong faith in his promises. The female disciples of Jesus Christ also set professors an example; for when they had an act of kindness to perform towards Christ, we are told, that “upon the first day of the week, “very early in the morning, they came unto the “sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had “prepared.” Luke, xxiv. 1. To conclude this branch of the subject: I conjure you, as you love the house and ordinances of God, as you value your own edification, and would not prevent the edification of others, let your attendance on God’s service be early, that you may neither lose nor interrupt the supplications which are offered to the Majesty of heaven.

*Obj. III.* The prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple was an extempore prayer. Few questions have been agitated with more warmth among Protestants and real Christians than that which relates to written and extempore prayers, some earnestly contending for forms of prayer, and others as strenuously contending against them. I shall give a decided opinion upon the subject; but I hope to do it with all the candour which one Christian should shew towards another in things not essential to salvation.

Those who are advocates for forms of prayer, maintain that they were used under the Old Testament dispensation; and in proof thereof cite the

the words which Aaron was expressly commanded to use, when he blessed the children of Israel, as related Numb. vi. 24, 25, 26.; and also that prayer which was used at the removal and resting of the ark, Numb. x. 35, 36.; together with some other passages of a similar description.

The advocates for extempore prayer, in reply, readily admit, that forms of prayer and thanksgiving were ordained and constantly used under the Jewish dispensation, though not to the total exclusion of extempore ones; but they reject the inference drawn from it, namely, that they ought not only to be used, but even preferred to extempore prayer in New Testament times. They support their objection to this conclusion upon the ground, that it is neither reasonable nor scriptural to look for the pattern of Christian worship in the Mosaic dispensation, which, with all its rites and ceremonies, is abrogated and done away, to make room for one which is, in every respect, more glorious and more beneficial.

The chief rule of direction upon this subject for the Christian church is the authority and example of Christ, as placed before his disciples, and by them transmitted to the churches, which, through the blessing of God, they were instrumental in gathering. The disciples asked Christ to teach them to pray, and he gave them what is called the *Lord's Prayer*; not so much to be used by them as a form, but rather as a rule to direct



them and the Christian church in general, as to the materials of which their prayers should be composed, and the spirit in which they should be offered. The instruction of Christ upon this subject is best illustrated by his own example: the supplications which he offered to his Father were of the description for which we are pleading. We have an account of some short ejaculatory prayers of Christ in Matt. xi. 25, 26. and Luke, xxii. 41, 42.; and also of a larger and more public prayer offered for his church and people, and given more at length in the seventeenth chapter of John's gospel. All these were uttered out of the abundance of the heart by the special aid of the Holy Spirit.

If we look to the authority and example of the apostles, every thing there is in favour of extempore prayer; for we know of no forms of prayer either enjoined or used by them. All the passages which they have written upon prayer, favour that which is free and unpremeditated, dictated by the inward state of the mind, and the trials and temptations with which it is surrounded. But as it would be improper in me to divert your attention from those parts of this subject in which we are all agreed, to enter at large into the controversies which good men have had upon the point, I shall content myself with saying, that I give a decided preference to extempore prayer, in the closet, the family, and the church:—1. Because it leaves

the greatest scope for the devout exercise of the heart, and it is to the heart that the gracious Hearer of prayer looks; for what is a well-composed and well-expressed prayer, unless the soul breathes after God in it? It is like a well-shapen human body destitute of the vital principle.

2. Because it leaves the greatest room for the agency of the Holy Spirit, from whom real Christians, when in prayer, often derive such freedom of expression, such energy of feeling, and such strong faith to believe the promises; and to wrestle with God for the application of the comfort of them to the soul, as constrains them to say, "This is the finger of God." *Exod. viii. 19.\**

After

\* Bishop Wilkins speaks so candidly and so suitably upon extempore prayer, that I cannot forbear introducing his remarks: "For any person so to sit down and satisfy himself with his book-prayer, or some prescript form, as to go no farther, this were still to remain in his infancy, and not to grow up in his new nature: this would be, as if a man who had once need of crutches should always afterward make use of them, and so necessitate himself to a continual impotence. It is the duty of every Christian to grow and increase in all the parts of Christianity, as well gifts as graces; to exercise and improve every holy gift, and not to stifle any of those abilities wherewith God hath endowed them: now, how can a man be said to live suitable to these rules, who doth not put forth himself in some attempts and endeavours of this kind? And then, besides, how can such a man suit his desires unto several emergencies? What one says of counsel to be had from books, may be fitly applied to this prayer by

After all, though I have freely expressed my opinion in favour of extempore prayer, if the reader differs from me upon this head, both in opinion and practice, I condemn him not: the great matter is, to pray with the heart; to pray in faith: and of those that pray in this manner, whether with or without a form, I can heartily say, "Peace be on them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." Gal. vi. 16.

*Obj.* IV. In Solomon's address to God there is a pleasing union of the grace and gift of prayer.

In Solomon we behold a striking proof of the free and abundant mercy of God. The wisest, the richest, and, in all respects, the greatest king upon the face of the earth, exhibits, in this prayer, various and strong marks of a gracious mind. He appears to forget his worldly greatness; and, utterly disregarding the opinion of

"book; it is commonly of itself something flat and dead, floating, for the most part, too much in generalities, and not particular enough for each several occasion. There is not that life and vigour in it to engage the affections, as when it proceeds immediately from the soul itself, and is the natural expression of those particulars whereof we are most sensible.

"And if it be a fault not to strive and labour after this gift, much more is it to jeer and despise it by the name of *extempore prayer*, and *praying by the Spirit*; which expressions (as they are frequently used by some men by way of reproach) are for the most part a sign of a profane heart, and such as are altogether strangers from the power and comfort of this duty." *Bishop Wilkins's Gift of Prayer*, p. 11, 12.

worldly

worldly men, he stands before God in the character of an humble, penitent, and devout suppliant, for himself and for his people; in doing which, his infirmities appear to have been abundantly helped by the Spirit of God, both as it regards grace and gifts.

The gift and the grace of prayer are distinct things in their nature, and are often separated from each other. We may justify this remark by the authority of the apostle Paul, who, in 1 Cor. xiii. 2, 3. seems to take it for granted, that great gifts, such as that of an ability to prophesy and to understand mysteries, may be possessed by persons who have no divine charity, or love; nay, it has been proved in the case of such men as Balaam and Judas, who could not only speak well of God, but might be gifted to utter wise and excellent things to God in a way of prayer. But, however largely they might have the gift, they were destitute of the grace of prayer; they each one answered, in the highest degree, to that description, "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." 1 Cor. xiii. 1. May it be the happiness of every one of us to differ from these, and answer fully to an opposite description, "a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. ii. 5.

If there be a difference between the grace and the gift of prayer, and the former is often found where there are not the least traits of the latter,



how anxious should we all be, but especially ministers, not to be satisfied with the mere gift of prayer! This of itself is not only of little or no use, but it often becomes injurious and detrimental: the gift of prayer has often been the instrument of drawing out and increasing the corruptions of the heart, by making its possessor proud and imperious, vain and self-sufficient, aiming, in an ostentatious manner, to set forth self, and promote its own carnal ends in obtaining the approbation and applause of men. How opposite is the influence and effect of the grace of prayer in the real Christian! It fills him with high and reverential thoughts of God, with humbling and abasing thoughts of himself, and influences him in all things to aim at approving himself to God, and promoting his glory. He who has only the *gift* of prayer will find it of little or no use in seasons of duty, in the hour of affliction, or in the more solemn and interesting scenes of death; whilst he who has the *grace* of prayer finds increasing advantages from it, as by its instrumentality the soul is supported in and carried above all its trials and discouragements; is carried up to God in the exercise of faith and hope, and returns back again full of the consolations and triumphs, which arise out of a knowledge of interest in the love and favour of God, and a well-grounded assurance of eternal life by Jesus Christ.

But

But if we have both the gift and the grace of prayer, God has dealt bountifully with us indeed; he has given us *ten talents*, and capacitated us to be doubly useful, in the world and in the church. Let us remember, however, that he who receives much, from him much is expected; the more gifts and the more grace, the greater responsibility lies upon us: may we be enabled to use all for the glory of God and the good of perishing sinners! and at last hear it said, "Well done; thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Matt. xxv. 21.

*Obs.* V. It was a suitable and appropriate prayer. It deserves this character, because, in this prayer, Solomon exhibits a truly devotional spirit; asks for things highly requisite for himself and his people; and exemplifies his own maxim by expressing the whole in "acceptable words." Eccles. xii. 10. Though an extempore prayer, it has no traits of meanness, confusion, or deficiency, but it is every thing that could be wished for upon the occasion. Solomon appears conscious that he is addressing the infinitely great and gracious Jehovah, even that God "who searcheth the heart," who cannot be deceived, and who will not be mocked. He therefore prays to him with becoming reverence and humility, and yet he speaks with a freedom and energy ex-

pressive of his faith and confidence in God, and which prove not only that he was accustomed to this holy and delightful work, but also that in this extraordinary service he was peculiarly impressed with its importance and solemnity, and that he was wonderfully assisted by the Holy Spirit in the part which he took in it.

The occasion of this prayer was the dedication of the temple; and in allusion to this great work he thus expresses his wonder and admiration at the goodness and condescension of God: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold! the heaven, and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded," ver. 27. He takes no satisfaction in, or praise to, himself, from the magnitude or from the splendour of the temple; but, like a true Israelite, he acknowledges that the whole work, in its preparation, progress, and completion, was of God: "The Lord hath performed his word that he spake," ver. 20. And now that the great and good work is finished, through the kind providence of God, what remains, but that the priests of the Lord proceed to appropriate it to the purposes for which its several parts were designed? Solomon is aware that the chief thing is yet to be obtained, namely, the presence and blessing of the God of Abraham; and for this he pleads in the following manner: "That thine eye may be open toward this house  
" night

“night and day, even toward the place of  
 “which thou hast said, My name shall be there,”  
 ver. 29.

The suitableness of Solomon's prayer will appear, if we consider the branches of which it is composed—

1. As it is a prayer for the Jewish nation, that their peace and prosperity might be abundant and permanent: and supposing they should decline from the ways of God, and thereby fall under the correction of his hand, by experiencing dearth, famine, pestilence, war, or captivity, he implores God to give them grace to repent, and return to him in that house with prayer and supplication, and that he would forgive, restore, and bless them. He urges these petitions for them upon a variety of grounds, as suitable as they are scriptural. Jerusalem was the city the Lord had *chosen*, ver. 44.; and respecting the nation itself, he reminds God of the relation it stood in to him, and the wonderful things which he had done for it: “They be thy people and  
 “thine inheritance, which thou broughtest forth  
 “out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace  
 “of iron. Thou didst separate them from among  
 “all the people of the earth to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses  
 “thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers  
 “out of Egypt, O Lord God!” ver. 51. 53. In praying for the Jews, he also puts God in remembrance



membrance of his covenant and promise; and these have, in every age of the church, been a strong foundation for the hope and comfort of praying souls: "And he said, Lord God of  
 " Israel, there is no God like thee in heaven  
 " above, or on earth beneath, who keepest co-  
 " venant and mercy with thy servants that walk  
 " before thee with all their heart: who hast kept  
 " with thy servant David, my father, that thou  
 " promisedst him; thou spakest also with thy  
 " mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand,  
 " as it is this day," ver. 23, 24.

2. It is suitable, as it is a prayer for the church. In this view of it we shall find many instructive considerations. Solomon takes it for granted, that there would be a constant assemblage of the tribes at the altar of God to pay their homage; but he apprehends the worshippers would not all come in sincerity and truth;—that hypocrites and unbelievers would mingle with the real saints, as had been the case in all ages, of which the history of Cain, Esau, Balaam, &c. furnished abundant proof. When Solomon, therefore, prays thus:  
 " Then hear thou in heaven, and do and judge  
 " thy servants, condemning the wicked, to  
 " bring his way upon his head; and justifying  
 " the righteous, to give him according to his  
 " righteousness," ver. 32. he confesses the awful mixture of good and bad men in the church. But notwithstanding the Lord may thus suffer  
 mere

mere professors long to mingle with the saints, having said, "Let both grow together," Matt. xlii. 30. the time draws nigh, when Jesus the great head of the church shall completely accomplish what his forerunner says of him, "He will  
 "thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his  
 "wheat into the garner; but he will burn up  
 "the chaff with unquenchable fire." Matt. iii. 12.

The principal subject of his prayer for the church is the forgiveness of sin. The value of this blessing, and the way in which it was to be obtained, were well known in the Old Testament, and are beautifully expressed by David:  
 "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,  
 "whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to  
 "whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and  
 "in whose spirit there is no guile." Psa. xxxii. 1, 2. Solomon was well acquainted with the description of people who ultimately embrace and walk in the comfort of this delightful truth, even those "which shall know every man the  
 "plague of his own heart," ver. 38. Men never heartily pray for this blessing, or cordially believe and embrace the promise of it, till they are thus brought to see the evil, and feel the burden, of sin. Hence Jesus Christ united in one great promise those two branches of spiritual good: "He  
 "will reprove the world of sin—He shall glorify  
 "me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew  
 \* it

" it unto you." John, xvi. 8. 14. Those to whom the Holy Ghost makes this gracious discovery, will surely feel the purifying tendency of it upon the soul, and will cordially unite with Solomon in the following words: " That he  
 " may incline our hearts unto him to walk in  
 " all his ways, and to keep his command-  
 " ments, and his statutes, and his judgments,"  
 ver. 58.

3. In this prayer Solomon is led to pray for the gentiles which may be profelyted to the Jewish faith: " Moreover concerning a stranger, that  
 " is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of  
 " a far country for thy name's sake (for they  
 " shall hear of thy great name, and of thy  
 " strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm),  
 " when he shall come and pray toward this  
 " house; hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-  
 " place, and do according to all that the stranger  
 " calleth to thee for," ver. 41, 42, 43. The conversion of the heathens from their idols to the knowledge and worship of the true God was the subject of God's eternal purpose: " Ask of me," said the Father to the Son, " and I shall give  
 " thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the  
 " uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Psa. ii. 8. And it was the subject of divine revelation in the patriarchal, prophetic, and apostolic ages: to Abraham it was said, " In thy seed shall  
 " all the nations of the earth be blessed." Gen.

xxii. 18. The prophet Isaiah is full of the pleasing truth, that Christ should be "a light of the gentiles," Isa. xlii. 6.; and that the isles "should wait for his law," Isa. xlii. 4.; yea, that "all the ends of the earth should see the salvation of God." Isa. lii. 10. The New Testament explains and confirms all these predictions: Christ gave his disciples command, saying, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Mark, xvi. 15. His death embraced this desirable object; for the apostle Paul gives this description of it: "Now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ; for he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us." Eph. ii. 13, 14. The first fruits of this glorious harvest has long since been presented to God—May the efforts which the Christian church is now making to extend the gospel to the heathen nations hasten the full completion of it, "and let the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen, and Amen." Psa. lxxii. 19.

*Obf. VI.* This prayer was heard and answered. This might naturally be expected from the character of him to whom it was addressed, a God "that heareth prayer," Psa. lxxv. 2; and from the complexion of the prayer itself; for it had all the properties of genuine heart prayer, the prayer of  
faith



faith which prevails with God. In one scripture it is said, "Now when Solomon had made an  
 "end of praying, the fire came down from hea-  
 "ven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the  
 "sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the  
 "house." 2 Chron. vii. 1. These were gracious  
 tokens of acceptance. Our temples, our sacrifices,  
 resemble not Solomon's, of course we cannot  
 have similar expressions of the acceptance of our  
 prayers; but if we worship in the assembly of  
 the saints with true spiritual worship, there is a  
 glory revealed in the house which the eyes of our  
 minds can perceive, and there is a fire which de-  
 scends upon the altar of the Christian's heart,  
 even that fire which made the hearts of the two  
 disciples burn within them while Christ talked  
 with them by the way, and opened to them the  
 scriptures. Luke, xxiv. 32. There were not only  
 some outward tokens of acceptance, but "the  
 "Lord appeared unto Solomon by night, and  
 "said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and  
 "have chosen this place to myself for a house of  
 "sacrifice." 2 Chron. vii. 12. Christians have  
 no ground to expect a voice from heaven to say,  
 that their prayers are heard and accepted; but  
 the Holy Spirit supplies this deficiency by dwell-  
 ing in them, and bringing home to their minds  
 the evidence of this truth, by a sweet sense of  
 the forgiveness of sin, great nearness to God in  
 ordi-

ordinances, and an abundance of heavenly joy and peace, accompanied by a holy regard to the name, the word, and the glory of God, together with an affectionate regard to the temporal and eternal interests of their fellow-creatures.

*Improvement.*—1. When we contemplate the character and conduct of Solomon through the medium of that day on which the temple at Jerusalem was dedicated to Jehovah, and the prayer presented in the public congregation on that occasion, in what an amiable and instructive point of view does he appear! On that day he truly shone with lustre, as an humble, holy, and devout believer in the God of Abraham; and as one furnished with such rich endowments of mind, and such ardent zeal for the divine glory, as promised to render him eminently useful in his exalted station: but how awfully did he depart from God! how suddenly is his glory turned into shame! “For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father: for Solomon went after Ashtaroath, the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites.” 1 Kings, xi. 4, 5. What a striking proof of the depravity of the human heart! what a loud call is such an humbling truth to all good men, to “watch and pray, lest they enter into temptation!”

2. This

2. This magnificent temple which Solomon built at the expense of so much wealth and labour, this altar before which he offered this devout and fervent prayer, where are they now? They are no more: they fell not a prey to the rude hand of time, but they fell by the hands of barbarian conquerors, as a judgment for the wickedness and idolatry of the Jews, who were themselves scattered among all the nations of the earth, according to the frequent and faithful predictions of the prophets of the Lord. How truly may the words of Jeremiah be applied to the present as well as to the former degraded and miserable estate of the Jews! "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!" Lam. iv. 1.

3. These things were written for us, and we should study them carefully. The glory of the Lord is not yet departed from our British Israel. In our churches, our families, and our closets, the holy incense of prayer continues to rise up before the Lord. Let us read the history of Solomon, and of the temple he dedicated to God, with holy fear and trembling. Let these hold forth a warning to Britain, lest by a departure from the simplicity of the gospel of Christ, and from the purity of Christian worship, together with the aboundings of sin and iniquity, we provoke the Holy One of Israel to depart from us, make our land a desolation, and take

the candlestick out of the midst of us, as he did from the seven churches of Asia. May the Lord avert such calamitous events from us, and continue among us his presence and blessing, for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*



## SERMON V.

### PRAYER MEETINGS.



Acts, xii. 12.

*Many were gathered together praying.*

THE Acts of the Apostles is the ecclesiastical history of the first ages of Christianity, and is truly valuable, not only on account of its antiquity, but for the artless simplicity and unimpeachable integrity with which it is written, neither concealing nor apologizing for the failings of the first Christians: the contention between Paul and Barnabas is as fully and as faithfully related, as those labours and sufferings of theirs which redound so much to their honour, or rather to the honour of that grace which helped all their infirmities.

In this book we have a relation of the early and rapid progress of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding it was in general preached by plain and unlettered men, and had to contend  
with

with the proud philosophy of the gentile schools, and the deep-rooted prejudice of the unbelieving and hardened Jews; although it was opposed by civil and ecclesiastical rulers with all their legal authority and power, and by the infatuated populace with noise and tumult, yet "the word of the Lord grew and multiplied." Acts, xii.

24. It triumphed over all the ignorance, enmity, and carnality of the hearts of men, and brought thousands to the knowledge and experience of grace and holiness. The preachers of this gospel, equally invulnerable by the allurements of worldly ease and prosperity, as by the reproaches and persecutions with which their enemies assaulted them, were carried forward in the honourable and arduous service which the great Head of the church had assigned them, with growing delight and unexampled success, overturning alternately Pagan and Jewish altars, and erecting in their places "Christ crucified," the true and living altar, which sanctifieth both the giver and his gift.

This part of the word is peculiarly interesting to the people of God, because it contains an impartial description of the constitution, discipline, and officers of the primitive churches, and presents to us that plain, useful, and perfect pattern, after which every Christian society, which professes to venerate the authority of Christ and his apostles, should be formed. Those churches

had a peculiar glory and lustre attendant upon them, through being "edified, and walking in" the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the "Holy Ghost." Acts, ix. 31. This happy state was instrumentally produced by the disinterestedness of the first Christians: their hearts were so raised above the love of the world, that they "had" all things common," chap. ii. 44. and took cheerfully the spoiling of their goods, and counted it nothing in comparison of the unsearchable riches of Christ. It was promoted also by their great love and union; for it is said, "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul," chap. iv. 32. The union of Christians is at once their glory and their strength. They were also remarkably diligent in all the means of grace; they forsook not the assembling of themselves together, but "continued stedfastly" in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and "in breaking of bread and in prayers," chap. ii. 42. In the last of these we find, by our text, the church of Jerusalem was now occupied: "Many" were gathered together praying."

In the darkest and most afflicting times of the church there will some be found who are faithful to Christ and the truth: the disciples of Christ have been forbidden to assemble together; the apostles have been strictly enjoined to speak no more in the name of Jesus; Stephen has been stoned, and James, the brother of John, has been killed

killed by the sword of Herod; and still they continue to meet, and devote the hours of midnight to the worship of God. They that love Christ will neither forget nor forsake him; no authority can dissolve their allegiance to him; no personal considerations can abate their love to him: persevering in his service, they say, by their actions, to their persecutors, what Peter had boldly said to the council, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Acts, v. 29.

The place where they were now assembled to worship was the dwelling-house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark. It is highly honourable to this disciple, that she will give shelter to Christ and his little church during the storm which had been raised at Jerusalem: indeed, under God, the cause of Christ has often reaped singular advantages from the holy zeal of good women. It is evident, by the conversation which Christ had with the woman of Samaria, John, iv. 21—24. that all idea of the sanctity of places was to be done away under the gospel dispensation, and the disciples of Jesus Christ carry their Master's doctrine into full practice; and without doubt they worshipped God as devoutly and as acceptably in this private house, as they could have done in the temple, for "the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." 1 Sam. xvi. 7.



When useful ministers are silenced and hindered in their work by arbitrary and persecuting governors, it is a great affliction to the church, and calls for frequent and fervent prayer. This was now the case at Jerusalem; some of the ministers of Christ had fallen a sacrifice; some were scattered, and others were in prison. How suitable and needful that all hearts should unite in beseeching God to stay the enmity of wicked men, restore to them their ministers, and thereby grant them the free and open administration of divine ordinances! Perhaps this meeting of prayer had for its immediate object Peter's deliverance, seeing it is said, "Prayer was made without ceasing of the church to God for him," ver. 5. There have been times in our land, when the ministers of Jesus Christ have either been utterly silenced, or prophesied "clothed in sackcloth," Rev. xi. 3.; but thanks be unto God, he has long since said to us, and continues to this day to verify it, "Yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers." Isa. xxx. 20.

It is peculiarly worthy of our notice, that whilst the church were uniting together, and wrestling with God in prayer, the angel of the Lord is sent to release and restore their minister to them again:—the chains fall from Peter's hands, each ponderous bolt and bar is unloosed, the massy gates are thrown wide open, and he comes

comes forth from that horrid place, where the martyrs of oppression were entombed alive, and destined to sigh and groan out an existence of solitude and woe! What a pleasing incident was this deliverance in itself! what a striking interposition of the power and providence of God! what a signal answer to prayer! and what a confirmation of the sovereignty of God in the dispensing even of temporal salvation! Were there not any children of sorrow immured within the walls of the prison from whence Peter had just been released, whose imprisonment was equally subversive of those eternal maxims of justice which should form the basis of social order, and to illustrate and strengthen which should be the perpetual aim of the civil magistrate? If there were, then why, thou great Benefactor of the human race, why did not thine eye pity their woe, and thy hand break their fetters? Why are the prison-doors to open but for one individual, and that individual a preacher of the gospel of Christ, and, like one of his brother-preachers, esteemed by all that were accounted wise and good in Jerusalem, nothing less than "a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ring-leader of the sect of the Nazarenes?" Acts, xxiv. 5. Why this distinction? Why is miraculous power displayed to deliver one child of oppression, while all the rest are left to groan in misery?

misery? " Even so, Father, for so it seemed good  
 " in thy sight!" Luke, x. 21.

The messenger from heaven having fulfilled his commission in bringing Peter out of prison, instantly departed from him, offering him no further advice nor assistance, but leaving him to follow that line of conduct, which a lawful concern for his own personal safety and the dictates of common prudence would suggest. Extraordinary guidance and assistance are only to be expected in seasons of peculiar necessity; God seldom grants them where the ordinary means are sufficient: thus God, in times past, revealed his mind to his people in dreams, and visions, and audible voices from heaven; but the necessity of these having now ceased, he guides his people, in matters of faith, worship, and practice, by the ordinary influence of his word and Spirit. Both the judgment and the feelings of Peter dictate, that he should immediately associate himself with the disciples of Jesus; and where is he so likely to find them as at the house of that well-known and long-tried disciple Mary? who is willing to encounter all the enmity of the civil powers, rather than that the disciples of Jesus should want a place of meeting: and how pleasing, when he comes, though in the silent hour of midnight, to find them holding a meeting of prayer!—Of such meetings I am now to discourse; in doing which I shall,

First,



First, Speak of their nature. Secondly, Shew the objects to which they should be directed, Thirdly, The great encouragement there is to begin and persevere in them. Fourthly, The blessings which attend them in those churches where they are most frequent and best conducted.

First, I shall speak of the nature of prayer meetings. The kind of prayer of which we are now speaking has sometimes been denominated social, because it is offered by a society of Christians in their collective capacity, convened for that particular purpose, either on some peculiar and extraordinary occasion, or at stated and regular seasons.

I. Prayer meetings are sometimes special, and relate to some particular object. 1. At the meeting and parting of dear friends, especially churches and ministers : we see something of this in the Acts of the Apostles ; when Paul arrived at Tyre he found there disciples, and abode with them seven days ; and when they were about to separate, they kneeled down on the shore, and prayed : this was neither the time nor the place of their usual and customary meeting for prayer, but it took its rise in the departure of the apostle, whom they were desirous of commending to the care and blessing of the great Head of the church. It would be much better with us, if more of our social and friendly meetings were literally meetings of prayer.

2. When



2. When the church is subject to unusual darkness, deadness, and barrenness. This remark applies either to the church at large, or to any distinct society. When it goes ill with Zion, all real believers will realize something of the prophet's feelings, and express themselves in his language: "O Lord! revive thy work in the  
 "midst of the years, in the midst of the years  
 "make known, in wrath remember mercy." Hab. iii. 2. But to pray individually for the prosperity of Zion will not suffice: the people of God will associate together for prayer, and thereby keep alive and increase their devotional frames; for as coals of fire, which have been separated and scattered, and thereby nearly extinguished, when collected together, recover their heat, and gradually burn up in a strong and vigorous flame, so is it with the almost dying embers of a spirit of prayer; collect its scattered particles together, and it revives again, and warms and animates every soul which comes within its circle. It was the known advantage and influence of social prayer that made the disciples, immediately after their Master had left them and ascended to glory, keep near to God and each other in this blessed exercise; for it is said, "These all continued with one  
 "accord in prayer and supplication." Acts, i. 14.

3. Individual churches have accustomed themselves to hold extraordinary meetings of prayer on various occasions; sometimes when the Lord has

has laid his hand on the ministers, who, from their wisdom, zeal, and faithfulness, were dear to them : and who can tell how often that promise, " The prayer of faith shall save the sick," James, v. 15. may have been accomplished in answer to the constant and earnest supplications of God's people? At other times churches hold extraordinary meetings of prayer when the Lord has taken away their ministers, to beg that he would watch over and keep them whilst in a destitute state, that he would unite them in heart, and influence them to make a wise and suitable choice, giving them a pastor that shall feed them with knowledge and understanding : and when the Lord has heard and answered their prayer in sending them such a minister, they hold one more special meeting of prayer, to which they invite the ministers, officers, and members of neighbouring churches, to unite with them in praise to the Lord for his goodness, and to supplicate his blessing upon their union. Meetings for prayer, of these descriptions, are known, by experience, to be truly pleasing and edifying ; and that they have arisen out of the practice of the apostles and primitive churches, is very evident from the following passages—When the church at Jerusalem had chosen seven deacons, according to the advice of the twelve, who said to them, " Brethren, look ye out among you seven men  
 " of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost ; they  
 " set

“ set them before the apostles, and when they  
 “ had prayed, they laid their hands on them.”  
 Acts, vi. 3. 6. When Paul and Barnabas were  
 travelling among the newly planted churches in  
 Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, it is said, that  
 “ when they had ordained them elders in every  
 “ church, and had prayed with fasting, they  
 “ commended them to the Lord on whom they  
 “ believed.” Acts, xiv. 21. 23.

4. Special meetings for prayer should be frequent and numerous in times of public calamity : there is encouragement to this from the promise of God, which says, “ Call upon me in the day  
 “ of trouble ; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt  
 “ glorify me,” Psa. l. 15. ; and also from many striking instances upon record in the word. That was an interesting period in the history of Israel, when “ Samuel said, Gather all Israel to  
 “ Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the  
 “ Lord.” The purpose of the meeting was to wrestle with God in prayer, and it was crowned with an abundant blessing ; for “ the Lord thundered with great thunder on that day upon  
 “ the Philistines, and discomfited them ; and they  
 “ were smitten before Israel ;” and that day of trouble and prayer ended in setting up a stone between Mizpeh and Shen, and calling “ the  
 “ name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath  
 “ the Lord helped us.” 1 Sam. vii. 5. 10. 12.  
 That also was a truly solemn meeting for prayer,  
 which

which the tribes of Israel held after their return from Babylon: "And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the Lord their God one fourth part of the day, and another fourth part of the day they confessed and worshipped the Lord their God. Then stood up upon the stairs of the Levites, Jeshua and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and cried with a loud voice unto the Lord their God." Neh. ix. 3, 4. We have another remarkable instance of the Lord's answering prayer when offered in the day of trouble and calamity in the case of Jehosaphat and Judah, of whom it is said, "And Jehosaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord, worshipping the Lord; and when Judah came towards the watch-tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and beheld they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped." 2 Chron. xx. 18. 24. These instances of the people of God uniting in prayer in special seasons of national danger, hold forth, in all ages, both an example and an encouragement to the church.

II. We shall now speak of meetings for prayer, which are stated and regular: of these there are several kinds, all equally important, and calculated to promote the edification of the churches.

The



The principal ones which are within my immediate recollection are :

1. Those weekly meetings for prayer, which have a special regard to the "state of our nation and churches." These meetings were formed upon the best motives, and are conducted with much seriousness and devotion ; their object is truly interesting. Our public concerns have long worn, and still continue to wear, a gloomy aspect : may the God who rules the storm, and rides upon the whirlwind, scatter the ominous clouds, and in answer to the prayers of the righteous, of whom there is still a remnant in our sinful land, pour down upon us the rich and abundant showers of his blessing in providence and grace ! The Lord has not yet said of Britain as he said of the Jews to the prophet, "Pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me, for I will not hear thee." Jer. vii. 16.

2. There are other meetings, denominated "Missionary prayer meetings," because they are held principally with a view to the spread of the everlasting gospel in heathen and unenlightened countries abroad, and to the introducing it into the dark towns and villages at home. These are numerously attended by Christians of all denominations, and have not only been times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord to individual believers, but they have greatly assisted to

promote the zeal and strengthen the union of all who are engaged in the glorious work of sending the glad tidings of salvation to the perishing heathen\*.

3. Those weekly meetings which are held in most of the churches and congregations where the gospel is preached faithfully and successfully. These have not only increased in number of late, but they have been more numerously attended, and the gift and grace of prayer have been enlarging: we may not only consider this as a favourable omen towards our churches; but we may rejoice in the beneficial effects which have already been produced. To the influence of these meetings we scruple not to ascribe that spiritual-mindedness, that holy zeal for the spread of the gospel, that more frequent and steady attendance upon the means of grace, and that strong and cordial union which we have seen revived among Christians; and we are confident, that the more this spirit of prayer is kept alive and extended among us, the more will its benefits be seen and felt in every direction. It is to these weekly meetings of prayer that our thoughts are at present principally directed; and therefore I shall proceed—

Secondly, To point out the objects to which

\* These meetings for prayer are held on the first Monday evening in every month, and the missionaries in the South Seas make a point of holding a prayer meeting as near the same hour as possible.

they

they should be chiefly directed. They may with propriety embrace sinners at large, who are lying in an awful state of darkness and guilt, and for all sorts and descriptions of men. The apostle gives a direction to this purpose :  
 “ I exhort therefore, that first of all, suppli-  
 “ cations, prayers, intercessions, and giving of  
 “ thanks, be made for all men, for kings, and  
 “ for all that are in authority, that we may lead  
 “ a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and  
 “ honesty.” 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2. Some might be ready to think, that wicked and persecuting magistrates ought not to be the subjects of prayer; but the apostle decides otherwise, and shews the propriety of it by two powerful considerations; the one expressed in the latter part of the second, and the other in the fourth verse.

But the special and more immediate object upon which we should fix our attention is the welfare of Zion: we should carry with us into our prayer meetings the sentiments and feelings of David, where he says, “ Pray for the peace  
 “ of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee;  
 “ peace be within thy walls and prosperity within  
 “ thy palaces. For my brethren and companions’  
 “ sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee;  
 “ because of the house of the Lord our God I  
 “ will seek thy good.” Psa. cxxii. 6—9. We should be very earnest and importunate with God that the boundaries of the church may be enlarged

larged and extended on every side; that the temple of grace may continue to rise, being built up not of *wood, hay, and stubble*, but of “*gold, silver, and precious stones.*” 1 Cor. iii. 12.

Our prayers should not only be directed to God for its enlargement by the addition of new converts, but also for the advancement of its edification, by a growth in knowledge, grace, and holiness. To this end we must follow the direction of our blessed Master, “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest,” Matt. ix. 38.; and also that he will keep those whom he hath sent, sound in the faith, walking closely with God, and adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. Thus armed for their spiritual warfare, they will rebuke with authority and plainness, and testify of the grace of God so freely and experimentally, that the churches will be comforted and built up on their most holy faith.

Whilst in our social meetings of prayer we express our desires to God for the prosperity of Zion at large, and especially for those sister churches that walk in the same faith and order with us, let us remember, that the primary object of these meetings is the peace, union, and prosperity of our own society; this is our own vineyard, our own family, and of course it enters into our duty to make it the first and principal object of our affection and care. It should operate



rate with us as a powerful stimulus, that there are many who worship with us in the general congregation, yea some perhaps in our own families, who have not yet discovered the glory, or felt the power of the Christian religion, and consequently have not yet given themselves wholly to the Lord and to the fellowship of his saints : it should be the constant subject of our prayer, that they may be truly converted to God, and thereby become entitled to all the privileges and blessings which belong to the faithful in Christ Jesus.

But now to be more particular. Seeing, in our weekly meetings of prayer, our own churches have a special interest in them, the objects which should immediately be prayed for are : 1. A blessing upon the officers of the church, that they may have wisdom and grace so to manage its concerns, and to walk before it with such a temper of mind, and in such an outward walk and conversation, as may be productive of the most beneficial effects. The want of wisdom and prudence, or of affection and zeal for the cause of God, in the minister and deacons of a church, must be at least an hindrance to its prosperity, if not an instrument of its dissolution ; therefore all that bear office in the church, whether ministers or others, of truly serious minds, will cordially join in addressing their respective churches

in the words of the apostle, " Brethren, pray for  
" us." 2 Theff. iii. 1.

2. Another particular subject of prayer at these meetings should be the sick and afflicted members of the church. It is not enough that they be visited at home, either by the minister or some other member of the society, according to the apostolic direction given in James, v. 14. ; but they should be carried by the whole society to the throne of grace in the arms of faith and prayer.

3. For the weak and the feeble of the flock : these should be the immediate object of the church's care and attention. Of the great Shepherd it is said, " He shall gather the lambs with his arm, " and carry them in his bosom." Isa. xl. 11. In the New Testament we have many exhortations relative to the weak in faith, the feeble-minded, and such as are unable to take strong meat, but must be fed with milk, and treated with great gentleness, lest their growth in grace and the consolations of the gospel be obstructed. These have sometimes been more helped by the plain and affectionate prayers of their brethren in social meetings, than by any other service.

4. The distressed and tempted soul has also a strong claim upon the church for an interest in its prayers, when surrounding the throne of mercy in its associate capacity. This is one of the mediums by which Christians comfort one another, and strengthen each other's hands against the

common enemy of souls. Tempted Christians, who have been led to suppose the temptations that assailed them altogether new and uncommon, have reaped a double benefit from the prayers of their brethren. They have perhaps been depressed above measure; but on hearing their brethren lament over and pray for strength against the same temptations, the snare has been broken, and they have believed and felt the truth of the apostle's words, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." 1 Cor. x. 13.

5. In our social prayers, we should not forget the backslider who hath declined from the good ways of God, who did once run well, but has been hindered. To such the apostle had reference when he said, "If any man see a brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death," 1 John, v. 16.: and another apostle says, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." Gal. vi. 1. What so likely to convince, humble, and restore a fallen brother, as making him the subject of humble and fervent prayer in our social meetings?

6. We should pray for the unruly and disobedient. There were some of these in the church

at Theſſalonica, and Paul directed that they ſhould be warned, 1 Theſſ. v. 14.; and there are too many of this kind in every church; they forſake the aſſembling of themſelves together, they are buſy-bodies and tattlers, or they are proud and cenſorious, impatient of contradiction and reproof, and alienated in affection both from the miniſter and the church: theſe are as diſeaſed ſheep in a flock, or as diſeaſed members in the body; they endanger the health and proſperity of the whole, and muſt either be healed or removed: if the wholeſome and lenient medicine of prayer and exhortation does not heal, there ſhould be an immediate ſeparation. It is the expreſs direction of Chriſt himſelf, concerning a diſorderly member of the church: “ If he neglect to hear  
 “ the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen  
 “ man and a publican.” Matt. xviii. 17.

Thirdly. The great encouragement there is to begin and perſevere in prayer meetings.

1. The relation God ſtands in to his church is a ſtrong ground of expectation. He is the God and father of his people; and all that children may expect from an affectionate and tender parent, they may aſſuredly look for at the hand of the Lord. By this ſimile Jeſus Chriſt taught his diſciples the intereſt they had in the kindneſs and liberality of his Father, both in regard to providence and grace: “ Take no thought, ſaying,  
 “ What ſhall we eat? or, What ſhall we drink?



“ or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (for  
 “ after all these things do the gentiles seek;) for  
 “ your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have  
 “ need of all these things.” Matt. vi. 31, 32.  
 And again, “ If ye, being evil, know how to give  
 “ good gifts unto your children; how much  
 “ more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy  
 “ Spirit to them that ask him?” Luke, xi. 13.  
 From the premises every society of Christians may  
 draw encouragement to ask largely, and expect  
 confidently the blessings of which they stand in  
 need, seeing God is their father, and that he has  
 in all ages given his children ample proof of his  
 tenderness, care, and liberality.

2. Christians may take much encouragement  
 to associate in prayer, from the consideration of  
 the great love which God has to the church. In  
 one place he says to it, “ Yea, I have loved thee  
 “ with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-  
 “ kindness have I drawn thee,” Jer. xxxi. 3.; and  
 in another, “ I know the thoughts that I think  
 “ toward you, saith the Lord; thoughts of peace  
 “ and not of evil, to give you an expected end:  
 “ then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go  
 “ and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto  
 “ you.” Jer. xxix. 11, 12. How strong is the  
 ground on which we may expect the presence  
 and blessing of God, especially when we recollect  
 how beautifully Christ urges this doctrine upon  
 his disciples, as the proper basis on which to  
 found

found the expectation of an immediate and gracious answer to prayer: " At that day ye shall ask in my name; and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you." John, xvi. 26, 27.

3. Another source of encouragement to social prayer, is the express promise of Him who " abideth faithful," and " cannot deny himself." 2 Tim. ii. 13. We not only have the promise of God to strengthen our faith in the expectations of an answer to prayer individually, but we have a suitable and an express declaration from the great Head of the church to encourage us to pray in our associate capacity: " Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Matt. xviii. 20. Yes; the presence and power of Jesus Christ is at times abundantly felt at these meetings; the spirit of prayer extends itself from heart to heart, and rises to such strength and activity, that it may be truly said, " The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Matt. xi. 12.

4. Christians have good reason to conclude their meeting together for prayer shall be attended with a blessing, because the glory of God is implicated in the safety and prosperity of all who fear him, and call upon him in sincerity and truth. It is the determination of God to promote his own glory by the instrumentality of his people;

ple; and therefore he says of the church of old,  
 " This people have I formed for myself; they  
 " shall shew forth my praise." Isa. xliii. 21. And  
 when the Lord was uttering awful denunciations  
 against Israel in the wilderness, saying, " I will  
 " smite them with the pestilence and disinherit  
 " them, and will make of thee a greater nation  
 " and mightier than they," Moses stood up as  
 an intercessor for them. The principal topic on  
 which he builds a most importunate and devout  
 prayer for their salvation, regards the honour and  
 glory of the Divine name. He supposes the hea-  
 then would triumph, and say, " Because the  
 " Lord was not able to bring this people unto  
 " the land which he swore unto them, therefore  
 " he hath slain them in the wilderness." To  
 prevent this calumny and reproach, and that the  
 Lord might magnify himself in the sight of the  
 heathen, he thus prays: " And now, O Lord!  
 " I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be  
 " great, according as thou hast spoken.—And  
 " the Lord said, I have pardoned according to  
 " thy word." Numb. xiv. 12. 16, 17. 20.

5. The peculiar interest which Christ takes in  
 his church is another source of encouragement.  
 Never let us forget, when we assemble for prayer,  
 that He whom John saw " in the midst of the  
 " seven candlesticks," Rev. i. 13. takes special  
 notice of and regards our supplications; his all-  
 seeing and watchful eye is ever towards the as-  
 semblies

semblies of his saints, and he carries their *social prayers* to his Father's throne with acceptance. Let us not then fear to ask much, and to ask often, seeing we have such a friend to present and recommend our prayers: if he complain of us at all in regard to our supplications, it will be in some such strain as this: "Hitherto have ye  
 " asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall  
 " receive, that your joy may be full." John, xvi.  
 24.

6. And lastly, We should be greatly encouraged in our meetings of prayer in the remembrance of God's having so wonderfully answered the prayers of his people. Prayer is a mighty weapon, and has accomplished marvellous things: the same effects which have been ascribed to faith, may be justly ascribed to prayer; for by this the people of God have "subdued kingdoms, wrought  
 " righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the  
 " mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire,  
 " escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness  
 " were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned  
 " to flight the armies of aliens." Heb. xi. 33, 34.

Those wonderful deliverances which were wrought for the church in the wilderness, were for the most part afforded as immediate answers to prayer: by prayer the very laws of nature were subverted; the clouds rained down bread, the flinty rock poured forth liquid streams, and the waters of the Red Sea divided, and afforded the  
 people



people a dry and a safe passage. The power of true believing prayer has extended its influence in a way of control to the sun and moon, Joshua, x. 12.; it brought a great thunder-storm upon the Philistines, and overthrew them, 1 Sam. vii. 10.; it supplied Elijah with the necessaries of life every morning and evening through the instrumentality of ravens, 1 Kings, xvii. 6. It has checked, broken, and destroyed numerous and well-appointed armies, Isa. xxxvii. 4. 36.; it has turned away the wrath of God, when it was just on the point of breaking forth as a devouring flame, Exod. xxxii. 9—14.; it has changed all the wisdom and experience of wise and crafty politicians into foolishness, and made their best concerted and most secret plans the instruments of their shame and of their destruction—compare 2 Sam. xv. 31. with 2 Sam. xvii. 14. 23.; it has broken open the prison-door of the grave, and liberated the mouldering captive, John, xi. 42, 43, 44.; and has afforded a kind of first-fruits of that great day of redemption which is hastening on, in which Christ shall bring forth the slumbering dust of all his saints: finally, it has, in a manner, conquered and overcome the Almighty; pressing through every difficulty, and refusing to take any denial, it has at last prevailed, and not only received the blessing, but received it with high commendation: such was the nature of the prayer of Jacob at Bethel, and also that of the woman

woman of Canaan, whose daughter was grievously vexed with a devil. With so many pleasing instances of speedy and gracious answers to prayer, some granted to individuals, and some to the church collectively, how sure and certain is the success of our prayer meetings, if they are formed upon good principles, and managed with godly wisdom !

Fourthly. The blessings which attend them in those countries and churches where they are most frequent and best conducted.

1. They are a blessing to the country. The praying part of the community are its glory and its strength ; if there had been ten of this description found in Sodom, the Lord would have spared it for their sakes, Gen. xviii. 32. ; and it was because there were a few of these praying people among the Jews in the days of the prophet, that he was led to say, “ Except the Lord  
“ of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant,  
“ we should have been as Sodom, and we should  
“ have been like unto Gomorrah.” Isa. i. 9. I would not depreciate the excellency or the value of any man, who is either an ornament or a friend to his country, but I cannot forbear to ask, What is the literary man, who writes for his country ? what is the orator, who displays all the energy of human eloquence in pleading for it ; or the man of martial courage, who jeopard his life in the high places of the field, either for  
its

its defence or its salvation? These are honourable, these are useful men to their country; but they can never promote its welfare in the measure and extent of those who, uniting in prayer to God for it, lay hold of the arm of Omnipotence, and constrain it either to withhold the judgments it was about to hurl upon the land, or to awake for its support and deliverance.

2. Prayer meetings are a signal blessing to our churches. Solomon says, that as, “iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” Prov. xxvii. 17. If this be true as it regards social and friendly intercourse, how much more so in the concerns of religion! Often to meet with each other, and jointly converse with God at a throne of grace, is highly beneficial; it tends to enlarge and strengthen the bond of Christian union; it tends to make the weak strong, and the strong stronger still: this is one of the mediums by which Christian societies “go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.” Psa. lxxxiv. 7. This is one of the instruments by which the Holy Spirit fans the flame of true devotion, and keeps the soul alive to God. In short, prayer meetings are nurseries both to the gifts and graces of Christian societies, and have often proved instrumental in fitting individuals for more extensive spheres of usefulness in the church and in the world.

3. They

3. They promote the edification and comfort of all the parts of the church. The afflicted, tempted, and fearful, are helped to meet difficulties with more patience; and they often find the snares in which they were held broken, and themselves enabled to go on in their Christian course with joy and alacrity. They are especially of use to them who labour in the word and doctrine: our souls are often discouraged and cast down in the arduous and weighty employ in which God has placed us; the ordinary duties and temptations of it, and the apparent unprofitableness of our labours, lead us sometimes to say, "We have laboured in vain, and spent our strength for nought." But amidst them all, we can at other seasons say to our churches as the apostle did to one of old, "I know that this shall turn to my salvation, through your prayers and the supply of the Spirit." Phil. i. 19. Yes, when in meetings of prayer there is much and fervent supplication for the minister, it tends much to his profit: then he often feels his trials alleviated, and his soul strengthened to bear them with cheerfulness and patience. The apostle Paul acknowledges this in the following passage: "Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us, by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf." 2 Cor. i. 11. A praying people are helpers of their minister; they become instrumental



instrumental in giving him a door of utterance, and animate him to speak boldly and zealously the word of the Lord. Such people perform for their ministers the needful and honourable office which Aaron and Hur performed for Moses, when they " stayed up his hands, the one on " the one side and the other on the other side, and " his hands were steady until the going down of " the sun." *Exod. xvii. 12.* I shall now hasten to a conclusion of this subject, with an address to three descriptions of hearers, by way of

*Improvement.*—I. To you who never attend prayer meetings. If you are only general hearers of the word, and are strangers to the power of religion upon the heart, and, of course, live without prayer in the family and in the closet, it can be no matter of surprise that you neglect them, because your minds can have no relish for such exercises; but if you are really Christians, and are joined in church fellowship, I urge an attendance to them upon you both as a duty and a privilege. Perhaps it is a subject to which you have never seriously turned your thoughts, as to its being a question of duty: or it may be, you are satisfied with your non-attendance upon some such grounds as these: that there is no need of any person's attendance but those who immediately engage in prayer; or the service itself may be objectionable to you, because some exercise in prayer who have but small gifts, and the inac-

curacies of whose language are to you disgusting. But we can assure you, upon good evidence, that those prayers which are very plain indeed, and the phraseology of which will not stand the test of criticism, are frequently so scriptural, so devout, and withal so appropriate to the feelings and trial of the Christian, as to render them highly useful. Some absent themselves through a dislike to being called upon to pray : but this should not deter them, seeing our societies are free ; we have no compulsory laws, every individual is at liberty to comply with or refuse such invitations, according to the persuasion of his own mind. But in regard to giving countenance to prayer meetings by your personal attendance, we urge you to it by the consideration both of duty and interest : if you are absent, let it not be so much because you lack inclination, as because you lack opportunity : if you would strengthen the hands of your minister, if you would promote the union and prosperity of the church, then follow the apostle's direction, " Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." Heb. x. 25.

II. To you who once constantly attended them, and that with advantage to yourselves and others, we address the exhortatory reproof of the apostle : " Ye did run well, who did hinder you ?" Gal. v. 7. Suffer me to exhortate with you upon this head, and endeavour to shew  
you,

you, that you have adopted a line of conduct incompatible with the duty you owe to the church, and have forsaken your own mercies. Are you sure, that the reasons by which you have been influenced to give up your attendance, are such as will bear the test of the word of God, and which will obtain in their favour the verdict of your own conscience?

Is it better with your soul now than it was then, or is it as well? Have you the same heavenly and cheerful frame of soul? do you walk as closely with God? does the holy frame of love to God, his saints and his ordinances, burn as bright in your bosom as it did when you regularly went up with us to the altar of God, on our stated evenings of prayer? Or rather is it not worse with you in all respects? Are you not less frequent in your closet devotions, or more formal and lifeless in them? Are you not in closer friendship with, and more conformed to, the world? And are you not less devout and spiritual in your affections? We determine nothing upon the point, only propose these questions to you, and leave you to sit in judgment upon yourselves.

We submit to you who have left off attending prayer meetings, whether you have a right to expect that high degree of soul prosperity that is desirable, whilst you live in the habitual and wilful neglect of one of those means of edification to which saints of old were so strongly attached,

tached, and the advantages of which, to Christian societies, are still manifold and lasting? The church sought Christ in the streets of the city; in every street; that is, in all the instituted ordinances and services of religion: among these were the synagogue worship, where the scriptures were read, and the places where prayer was wont to be made; and if we expect to find God and have his presence, we must seek him not only in public and in private, but also in social prayer. Whilst our meetings of prayer are reviving on every side, both as to the numbers which attend and the spirit that pervades them, will you who were once the most forward in them, like Jonah, lie in a profound and carnal slumber? Awake! awake! lukewarm Christian: "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen; and repent, and do the first works." Rev. ii. 5.

III. To you that attend prayer meetings regularly. Of these there are two descriptions; those who take no active part in the service, and those who do. Some of the former are silent worshippers in these services only through the excess of diffidence, mingled perhaps with a measure of the fear of man and spiritual pride; shame also is a powerful foe, and may hold the good man, yea even the gifted man, back from this service. It is more than probable that some of you have gifts, but they have never been stirred up or put forth by exercise; and if on trial they prove to



be small, yet neither should you envy those who possess greater, nor be discouraged in the exercise of your own. God loves to work by weak instruments, and has often done it to secure the glory of all to himself.

Others have gifts, and grow much in the exercise of them : to you it may be needful to give caution and direction. Be watchful against pride and self-importance ; do not overvalue your gifts : this was the sin and folly of the Corinthian church, and it gendered those contentions and divisions among them, for which the apostle denominated them carnal. As an over-press of sail sometimes proves injurious to the vessel which carries it, such is the undue elevation of the mind by gifts. Excessive self-admiration and outward applause has puffed up and inflated the minds of many professors in the most awful manner, so that unto them ultimately might be applied the alarming words of the apostle, " Holding faith, and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck." 1 Tim. i. 19. Though we mention these admonitions and warnings from love to your souls, we indulge the pleasing thought, that we may entertain the favourable opinion of you which Paul entertained of the Hebrews, when he said, " But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, though we thus speak." Heb. vi. 9.

We

We shall conclude with some directions to you who take an active part in prayer meetings. If we would derive from them all the advantages they are capable of affording, we must conduct them upon a wise and prudent plan. The beauty, the spirit, and the edification of these exercises are lost, when those who engage in prayer are long, and use tautology ; then they are tedious and irksome, and we depart with minds fatigued and depressed, instead of being refreshed and strengthened.

The person praying, should not speak to God as an individual, but, as it is a social service, he should speak in a manner suitable to it. To pray in the church, in the same style as in the closet, making his own personal wants, trials, and temptations, the whole subject of his prayer, is inconsistent with the nature and design of the service.

It is equally wrong to make our prayers the medium of publishing our political creed. To endeavour to make God a party in those differences which subsist among good men on the subject of public measures, is wrong in itself, and tends to destroy that harmony and good-will which it is one end of these meetings to promote.

Neither let your prayers be tinged with the leaven of your private disputes and contentions : this is not the place nor the time to bring railing accusations against your brother, nor yet to vindicate yourself from those which he may bring

against you. When, therefore, you are in social prayer, endeavour to forget these things, and let your zeal for the glory of God and the prosperity of Zion swallow up every inferior consideration.

Whilst some good men carry their private disputes and their political creeds to their prayer meetings, the prayers of others look more like an expository lecture than an address to God. There is no need to explain the scriptures to the Almighty, nor is the period of our speaking to God the suitable time for doing it to our fellow-creatures.

Finally: Those who are a mouth for the church to God in our prayer meetings, should endeavour to furnish their minds well with the knowledge of scripture: this will not only assist them to offer suitable petitions, but give them a facility of expression which will prove pleasant to themselves and edifying to others. The use, however, of scripture expressions is carried to an extreme when they make the whole of prayer, and are introduced without any regard either to propriety or connexion.

Plainness and simplicity should also be studied in prayer meetings: for a plain man to fill his prayer with fine words, is as unnatural as for a ploughman to cover his rustic coat with gold and silver spangles, which, instead of exciting the admiration of any, would only produce the pity and contempt of all sensible and discreet persons.

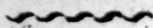
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Let us then, every one, in our meetings of prayer, study the things which tend to edification, coming to them with an humble, serious, and devout spirit, studying the general state of the society to which we belong, and the various wants, trials, and temptations, with which individuals are surrounded, and earnestly and affectionately commend the whole to the notice and blessing of the great Head of the church. Prayer meetings conducted upon this plan, and attended with this spirit, will tend much to unite, strengthen, and enlarge the boundaries of our Zion, and consequently should be countenanced by all who sincerely love the Lord Jesus Christ. Now to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be equal and endless praises. *Amen.*



## S E R M O N VI.

## FAMILY PRAYER.



JOSHUA, xxiv. 15.

*But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

**M**OSES, the man of God, and the faithful and ardent friend of the tribes of Israel, was now gone to the house appointed for all living, and, though not permitted to enter the land of promise, had entered into that more glorious rest, of which the earthly Canaan was only a figure; and Joshua, who spake the words of my text, and who had been the minister of Moses, was appointed his successor. His call was clear and unequivocal, Moses having (no doubt by divine direction) marked him out as his successor, and ordained him to it by having "laid his hands upon him." Deut. xxxiv. 9. It was, however, more plainly and distinctly recognised in the following passage: "Now after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, it came to pass,

" pass,

“ pass, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son  
 “ of Nun, Moses’s minister, saying, Moses my  
 “ servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over  
 “ this Jordan, thou and all this people.” Josh.  
 i. 1, 2. The work to which he was called was great  
 and difficult; but his call was clear and his en-  
 couragement great, having this gracious promise  
 from the Lord, “ There shall not any man be  
 “ able to stand before thee all the days of thy  
 “ life; as I was with Moses so I will be with  
 “ thee, I will not fail thee nor forsake thee,”  
 chap. i. 5.

This Joshua was one of the twelve persons de-  
 puted to execute the important and dangerous  
 service of making discoveries in the land of Ca-  
 naan, and one of the only two out of that num-  
 ber which remained faithful to their God and  
 their country, making an impartial and encou-  
 raging report of the land, and endeavouring  
 thereby to encourage the faith and hope of their  
 brethren.

As a man “ full of the spirit of wisdom,”  
 Deut. xxxiv. 9. the tribes of Israel formed high  
 expectations of Joshua, and not only cheerfully  
 acquiesced in his call to be the successor of Moses,  
 but in the most zealous and affectionate manner  
 avowed their attachment to his person, and their  
 unlimited subjection to his authority, in the fol-  
 lowing declaration: “ All that thou commandest  
 “ us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest

“ us we will go; according as we hearkened unto  
 “ Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto  
 “ thee; only the Lord thy God be with thee as  
 “ he was with Moses,” chap. i. 16, 17.

In no one instance did he come short of the character given, or the expectation formed of him: by his disinterestedness he was enabled to resist all those ensnaring temptations by which men in exalted stations are induced to swerve from their fidelity. By his undaunted courage he was enabled to face, without dismay, the numerous and warlike legions of the Canaanitish nations. In the midst of his most brilliant victories, he never became proud nor assuming; nor did he ever forego any of those prudent and cautious measures which result from the combination of wisdom and experience.

As the leader of Israel, he was a figure and type of the Captain of our salvation, of whom one prophet describes Jehovah as thus speaking: “ Behold, I have given him for a witness to the  
 “ people, a leader and commander to the people.” Isa. lv. 4. Joshua was typical of this great personage in his name, office, and exploits; for as he was called of God to lead the Jews into the promised land, so Christ was appointed to lead the spiritual Israel into “ a better country, “ that is, an heavenly.” Heb. xi. 16. As a believer, he was an exemplary pattern of unshaken  
 faith

faith in the promises of God, constant dependence upon his aid and blessing, and a patient enduring of the vexations and difficulties which he had to encounter in carrying the children of Israel into Canaan. In the whole tenour of his own experience and practice he exemplified the truth, the purity, and the energy of the religion he professed, and gave the people whom he governed a pattern worthy of their imitation.

The discourse out of which I have selected the words of my text, and which was delivered by him just before his departure from our world, evinces the suspicions he entertained of their relapsing again into idolatry, and expresses that seriousness of spirit, and that concern for the welfare of the church, which is worthy of a dying saint. He urges upon them the fear of God, and an unreserved obedience to his commands; and points out to them the blessedness which attaches to a course of holy obedience, and the awful judgments which must, sooner or later, follow a contrary line of conduct.

Whatever may be their determination upon this subject, he is resolved for himself to adhere firmly to the worship of the one living and true God, and to exert all his authority and influence to engage every branch of his own family in the same honourable service. This holy resolution does great credit to the leader of Israel, and is  
worthy



worthy of the serious consideration of all the heads of Christian families.

The particular regard which Joshua paid to family religion, will appear highly interesting, if we recollect the exalted station which he filled. The love and practice of religion in any man, however mean and obscure his situation in life, is lovely and pleasing, and affords a strong proof of the sovereignty and omnipotence of divine grace; but it is especially so in those persons who fill the highest offices in the state; because their temptations are not only many and various, but they are uncommonly strong and powerful; hence it is that we see such evident and abundant proof of that text, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." 1 Cor. i. 26. Joshua was a singular exception to this humbling truth; and through the grace and blessing of God maintained the spirit and practice of his religion to the last; no change of circumstances, either personal, domestic, or national, either warped his judgment, corrupted his principles, or induced him once to step aside from the paths of righteousness.

His attention to the concerns of religion will also appear extraordinary, if we consider the multitude of his cares and employments both in the field and in the council. It is natural to in-  
fer

fer this, from the nature of the office which he filled; an office of high responsibility both to God and men, and which must of necessity have occupied a large proportion of his time and attention. Had he been like too many statesmen of later times, he would not only have neglected religion himself, but he would not have thought the worse of any who hated it, and laughed at it as nothing but mere priestcraft; and whether his family either adhered to or neglected it, would have been to him a matter of equal indifference: Gallio-like, he would have cared for none of these things, and have thought the duties and difficulties of his station a sufficient apology for the total neglect of religion.

To see the full extent of Joshua's devotedness to God and religion, we must observe the state of religion among the tribes at this time. Though they were given to understand that the ancient inhabitants of the land were cast out for their idolatries; and though their own tribes had smarted for their folly in making the golden calf, thousands being destroyed by the fiery flying serpents, yet they are still hankering after the gods of the land. But Joshua, instead of being staggered either in his faith or his practice, instead of either conforming to their sinful practices, or in the least degree conniving at them, sets himself resolutely to discountenance them, boldly charges them to put away their strange gods, and serve the Lord in  
sincerity

sincerity and truth; and in the strength of the Lord makes this resolution, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

From this passage I am going to recommend to you a religious concern for the instruction and salvation of your households, through the medium of family devotions, especially prayer: in doing this I shall arrange my ideas upon the subject under a few general observations.

Obs. I. *Christian ministers should seriously and frequently urge the importance, and explain the nature of this duty to the heads of religious families.*

Whilst we acknowledge that it is an important and interesting part of religion, and that the neglect of it produces the most baneful effects both in the world and in the church, how can we but lament the decline and disuse of it among professing Christians, and that too without any pain or remorse, as if there were no duty neglected, nor any sin committed, whilst we shew a total disregard to the eternal welfare of the souls of our children and servants? To instruct, reprove, and exhort the heads of families upon this part of religion, is the indispensable duty of Christian pastors; a duty to which they are strongly urged by the consideration, that family devotions very much subserve and promote the usefulness of those which are more public; and tend, under the blessing of God, to prepare the  
mind



mind for the reception of the good seed of the word.

If it be an important and indispensable part of Christian duty in those who have the gospel of Christ ministered amongst them constantly with faithfulness and power, how much more important must it be in those families who are so circumstanced as to have very little, if any, of the means of grace within their reach! or if they have them, they are administered by such persons, and in such a way, as that they can hardly fail of being totally unprofitable to those who attend them. Family devotion being nearly the only social worship such persons have, should be cherished with more than ordinary care, and the heads of such families should aim to form their households into a church, and they may confidently expect that the Father of mercies will meet with and bless them. We have some reason for thankfulness, that whilst the good old practice of worshipping God in the family is falling into disuse with some (especially among those who reject the divinity of Christ, his atonement and righteousness, together with the work of the Holy Spirit), it is reviving and extending among others.

The heads of Christian families should resemble, in some degree, the great Head of the church, who sustains the characters of prophet, priest, and king. The duty of family instruction



tion was expressly enjoined upon Jewish parents in Deut. xi. 19, 20. " And ye shall teach " them" (the doctrines and commands of the Jewish religion) " your children, speaking of " them when thou sittest in thine house, and when " thou walkest by the way, when thou liest " down, and when thou risest up; and thou shalt " write them upon the door-posts of thine house, " and upon thy gates."

Parents and masters should also in a peculiar manner answer to the apostle's description, " an " holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices " acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. ii. 5. The sacrifices here spoken of were not typical or bloody sacrifices, but prayer and praise; nor are there any sacrifices of this kind more acceptable to God than those which the heads of families devoutly offer to God upon their family altars.

To Christian parents is also assigned the exercise of authority and government. This is applicable to all Christians, though the passage I am going to cite is principally spoken to ministers; but in this they are to be examples to others: " One that ruleth well in his own house, having " his children in subjection with all gravity. " For if a man know not how to rule his own " house, how shall he take care of the church " of God?" 1 Tim. iii. 4, 5. The government of the Christian parent must not be of that arbitrary and tyrannical kind in which the pride, self-

self-will, and passion of the governor will appear as prominent features ; this shews more of the natural man than of the Christian, and more strongly resembles “ the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience,” Eph. ii. 2. than the meek and lowly Jesus, whose representative he is supposed to be. Jesus Christ, in the exercise of his offices, shews much gentleness, compassion, and forbearance towards his people ; it is therefore the duty of all his followers to imitate his example.

Though prayer forms the principal part of family devotion, yet it may be and often is united with other profitable and instructive exercises, among which are reading and expounding the holy scriptures, singing praises to God, and catechising the younger parts of the family : the latter of these is a very important service, and has been productive of much good. Those who either have no evening lectures in their places of worship, or who make a point of never attending them, may devote the Lord’s day evening to this good work : and those who have not opportunity for it at that time, if they feel its importance, will find other seasons for it.

Like many other branches of religion, family devotion, if not conducted in a proper manner, might almost as well be forborne ; because it will neither be acceptable to God nor profitable  
to

to ourselves. It is desirable in the performance of this service, that all the family should unite in it, servants as well as others : to accomplish this, much depends on the choice of time : it should be at an hour least liable to interruption, either from the visits of our friends, the business of the world, or the domestic duties of the family ; it should be in the morning before the commencement of worldly occupations, and at night before the body is quite worn down with fatigue ; otherwise our offerings will be defective, and we shall be subject to some such reproof as that addressed to the Jews : “ And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil ? And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil ? Offer it now to thy governor, will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person ? saith the Lord of hosts.” Mal. i. 8.

Obs. II. *Family devotion is clearly and strongly recommended in scripture.*

Sometimes it is done by hints and allusions ; as is exemplified in the declaration which the Lord makes concerning the father of the faithful, when he says, “ I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him ; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment ; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” Gen. xviii. 19. Here it is taken for granted, that Abraham would earnestly look



look to the religious state of his family, and exert himself to shew every branch of it the way of truth and righteousness.

The duty of instructing and bringing up families in the knowledge and worship of God is expressly enjoined upon godly parents. In the Old Testament the injunction runs thus: "Train  
" up a child in the way he should go; and when  
" he is old he will not depart from it." Prov. xxii. 6. In the New it is as follows: "And ye  
" fathers provoke not your children to wrath;  
" but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Eph. vi. 4. We should not only endeavour to practise these commands by our occasional advice and instruction, but in stated and regular seasons of family devotion. If these labours of love be crowned with success, how beneficial is the effect both to parents and children, especially the latter! Solomon thus speaks of it: "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy  
" mother. Bind them continually upon thy  
" heart, and tie them about thy neck. When  
" thou goest it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest  
" it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest it  
" shall talk with thee; for the commandment is  
" a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of  
" instruction are the way of life." Prov. vi. 20—23.

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Again;



Again : Family religion is recommended by ancient customs. It was an idolatrous and wicked religion which Micah established in his family, and to perform the services of which he hired an indigent Levite of Bethlehem-Judah, as related in the following scripture ; “ And Micah said unto  
 “ him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a fa-  
 “ ther and a priest, and I will give thee ten  
 “ shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of ap-  
 “ parel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went  
 “ in. And Micah consecrated the Levite ; and  
 “ the young man became his priest, and was in  
 “ the house of Micah.” Judges, xvii. 10—12. As the existence of good coin gives rise to that which is base and counterfeit, in like manner corrupt systems of religious worship are forged in imitation of those which are true ; it is therefore reasonable to conclude, that this idolatrous worship performed in the family of Micah was a corruption of some species of family religion practised in better times and by better men. It is plain, that in the times of Saul there were family sacrifices, for David frames his excuse for being absent from Saul’s court upon this well-known custom, advising Jonathan (in case his father should inquire after him) to say, “ David  
 “ earnestly asked leave of me, that he might run  
 “ to Bethlehem his city, for there is a yearly sa-  
 “ crifice there for all the family.” 1 Sam. xx. 6. It is not at all unlikely that the fact was really

so, and that there was in the family of David a day of thanksgiving and prayer on some extraordinary occasion.

But we find the plainest and strongest recommendation of family worship in the example of the saints of God in every age of the church. The patriarchs were remarkable for their attention to this service; though they "sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles," Heb. xi. 9. yet wherever they pitched their tents, their first care was to erect an altar for God, and offer up the unfeigned and devout sacrifices of prayer and praise. See Gen. xii. 7, 8. and chap. xxvi. 25. and chap. xlv. 1. That David was a man who felt strongly for the spiritual interest of his family is plain by his well-known and dying declaration: "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire, although he make it not to grow." 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. And that he practised family devotions is evident by the following passage: "Then David returned to bless his household." 2 Sam. vi. 20. He had been long and earnestly engaged in public devotion, rejoicing and praising God for the return of the ark; and yet when he comes back to his house, his first care turns upon religion, even upon blessing his family in the exercises of prayer and praise. In

Job also we have another striking example of family devotion: "His sons went and feasted  
 " in their houses, every one his day, and sent  
 " and called for their three sisters to eat and to  
 " drink with them; and it was so, when the  
 " days of their feasting were gone about, that  
 " Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early  
 " in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings  
 " according to the number of them all; for Job  
 " said, It may be that my sons have sinned and  
 " cursed God in their hearts: thus did Job continually." Job, i. 4, 5. You that are heads of families, go and do likewise; gather your children and servants round you, and offer up for them the sacrifice of humble and importunate prayer; they have all sinned, and stand much in need of the benefit of that one great atonement which all the ancient sacrifices typified. Explain to them its nature and importance, and urge them to a believing dependance upon it for their whole salvation.

Christ also, when he retired from his more public services, accustomed himself to instruct and pray with his disciples in their domestic circles; and it appears, that from some of these they received more full and satisfactory explanations of the great doctrines and mysterious providences of God than they had obtained on other occasions. In short, Christians, in all times and in all places, have followed Joshua in a conscientious



entious regard to the religious state of their families, and have instructed and prayed with them.

Obf. III. *The nature and extent of the obligations which the heads of Christian families are under to this duty.*

The state of their families often renders it indispensable. Children and servants, it may be, are alike ignorant of themselves, of God, and of the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. Think then of the affecting interrogation of our blessed Lord: "What is a man profited if he shall gain  
" the whole world, and lose his own soul? or  
" what shall a man give in exchange for his  
" soul?" Matt. xvi. 26. They overlook this great truth, and are busied only about the things of time; they cannot pray for themselves, for they know not how; they will not pray, because they have no desire towards God. How ought you then to pity their souls, and pray for and with them, be a mouth for God to them, and a mouth for them to God! O aspire to the honour of becoming a father in Christ to some of your own household! But should you have the felicity to have your children and servants already walking in the ways of the Lord, prayer in your families is no less a duty, because you have family mercies for which to be thankful, family sins to confess, family wants to be supplied, family trials and cares, together with family duties, for which alone the grace of God can be your sufficiency;



and hence it is suitable and pleasing for the whole family jointly to wrestle with God in prayer for such blessings as shall advance their mutual edification.

Again : Our obligation to this duty arises from the regard we owe to the welfare of our country. Those families in which there is no fear of God, no devotional exercises, can be little better than nurseries of vice and irreligion. If parents and masters were in general frequent and spiritual in this holy work of praying in their families, who can calculate the good effects which would arise to society ? But the want of family religion is one reason why so many young persons turn out bad members of the community. The families, it may be, in which they have lived have been little more than heathens ; no reading of the word of God, no reproof for sin, no prayer to God : hence they not only come forth without any religious knowledge, and without any fear of God before their eyes, but they are totally destitute of every moral principle, and consequently stand upon the precipice of that temporal and eternal ruin, into which the depravity of human nature and the strong temptations of the devil have already hurried so many thoughtless young persons. Let not any of us then who are heads of families, either by our personal irreligion, or the neglect of those duties which we are now recommending, contribute in any degree to such tragical

cal scenes; but rather let the holiness of our lives, and the piety of our family devotions, say to our children and servants, "This is the way; walk ye  
" in it."

Once more: Our obligations to this duty are manifest by a recollection of the responsibility which attaches to the heads of families. The apostle has said, "If any provide not for his own, and  
" specially for his own house, he hath denied the  
" faith, and is worse than an infidel." 1 Tim. v. 8. Is it so great a crime for heads of families to neglect the common and temporal state of those whom Providence has placed under their care and protection? It must surely be an offence of much higher magnitude to neglect their souls; and that in proportion as the eternal welfare of the soul is superior to the present welfare of the body. Heads of families are stewards; they have souls committed to their care; and as ministers must one day give account of their stewardship, so must they. God says to such, in regard to their children and servants, Bring them up for me. Some of their souls may be saved, some of them may be lost: by the practice of family devotion you may promote the former, by the neglect of it you may hasten the latter. How truly awful would it be to hear your children and servants in the last day apologizing for their ignorance and irreligion in some such way as this: "We  
" lived in a family professing religion, it is true,

“ but we never heard the word of God read ;  
 “ we never heard one prayer put up to God for  
 “ the salvation of our souls ; we never had any  
 “ instruction or exhortation in regard to eternal  
 “ things ; and therefore, if our souls are lost,  
 “ we owe the dreadful evil, in part, to the cri-  
 “ minal negligence of our superiors.”

Lastly : There is an obligation to this good work arising out of the nature of the times in which we live ; not merely because they are calamitous times, although this consideration should quicken us to more activity and zeal in every religious duty, whether personal, relative, or public : but what I refer to principally, is the activity and success of the partisans of infidelity and irreligion. That scripture may, in some measure, be applied to our own times : “ Wo to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea ; for the  
 “ devil is come down unto you, having great  
 “ wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a  
 “ short time.” Rev. xii. 12. Infidelity is allowed by all to have had a rapid and extensive spread of late :—has not the want of family religion contributed much towards it ? and would not the enlargement and revival of this, present one strong barrier against its progress ? It is not owing to the wisdom or the eloquence of the enemies of Christianity that so many converts to infidelity have been made among the rising generation ; but to the ignorant and irreligious state in which they were



were found when assailed by the enemies of Christ and his truth. Equally estranged from the principles, enjoyments, and duties of the Christian religion, they could neither refute the objection, nor withstand the sneer of the infidel, notwithstanding they were alike weak and contemptible. All the eloquent declamations which have of late been produced against infidelity, and in favour of social order, moral principles, and revealed religion, have done little or nothing towards remedying the evil of which we complain. If the torrent of infidelity and irreligion which now runs down our streets be ever diminished, it will not be by means like these—no, it must be by the preaching of the pure gospel of Christ, that gospel which, when it is faithfully ministered, is the power of God to salvation. It must be by a revival of the power of religion in the souls of those who are heads of families. Then, instead of living in the total neglect of family religion, they will feel that they are called upon not only to renounce the world and sin themselves, but to desire the salvation of the souls of their children and servants; and instead of spending their evenings in the pleasures and dissipations of the world, they will be exercising the offices of prophet and priest in their families, by instructing them in the knowledge of the scriptures, and offering up to God for them the sacrifices of prayer and praise.

Obf.



Obf. IV. *To a wife and regular performance of family devotions there are many hindrances and discouragements.*

I have no doubt but there are heads of families who have not yet commenced the profitable work of reading the scriptures and praying in their houses, who feel the importance of the duty, and are very desirous of performing it, but know not how to overcome the difficulties which lie in their way: nay, they are not only desirous of it, but that it is not yet done is a great burden and grief to them; they have resolved upon it again and again, cordially approve it in others, and often with pleasure join with them, feeling at the same time a conscious shame at having so long neglected a known and important duty.

One difficulty, perhaps, in your way, is the supposed want of time: this is an imaginary hindrance: it is not from the absolute want of time, but from the want of plan in using and improving time, that the difficulty arises. Jacob must have been much engaged with care when he and his whole family were going down into Egypt to Joseph; yet it is said, that "Israel took his journey  
" with all that he had, and came to Beersheba,  
" and offered sacrifices unto the God of his fa-  
" ther Isaac." Gen. xlv. 1. Well as he loved Joseph, and ardently as he longed to see him, yet will he not neglect the worship of God to hasten his journey; and let every professor re-  
member

member that Christ has said, "He that loveth  
 " father or mother more than me is not worthy  
 " of me; and he that loveth son or daughter  
 " more than me is not worthy of me; and he that  
 " taketh not his cross, and followeth after me,  
 " is not worthy of me." Matt. x. 37, 38.

The spirit of this passage extends a great way. If we are so devoted to the cares, interests, and pleasures of the world, as to leave no time for family devotion, is it not because we love the world more than God? When the Jews of old withheld the Lord's tithes and offerings, and devoted all their worldly substance to their own personal use, God said, "Will a man rob God?  
 " yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein  
 " have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings;  
 " ye are cursed with a curse, for ye have robbed  
 " me, even this whole nation." Mal. iii. 8, 9. This awful malediction respects an omission of duty; nor ought we to suppose that it was a greater sin to neglect bringing the appointed tithes into God's house, than it is to neglect our own souls, and those of our servants and children, for and with whom it is our bounden duty to pray: nay, if there be any difference, the latter must be the greater sin, because in committing it a man robs both God and his family at once.

But let us look narrowly into this apology of the professing Christian: "I have no time." How can this satisfy the conscience? How can this be admitted as a true and sufficient excuse, when

when many of you who make it, find time both to pay and receive visits frequently? Nay, many who think to shelter themselves, behind this apology, from reproof for neglecting their own souls, and the souls of all who dwell under their roof, by the neglect of family prayer, find time to visit most places of public entertainment, and spend (I might say murder) much time at the card-table. If you are of this description of persons, that you should neglect all family devotion is no matter of surprise; for they who have a strong relish for the amusements of the world, never can favour much the devout exercises of prayer and reading the scripture. If these things had left you more time than they have, yet such is the company into which they have led you, such has been the conversation they have brought on, and such a temper of mind have they produced and cherished in your bosom, that you are completely unfitted for the performance of spiritual and holy exercises. There is indeed, in such instances, an awful proof of what is spoken by our Lord: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Matt. vi. 24.

Others of you, it may be, are deterred from family devotions under an idea that you have no gifts. This is a point on which, perhaps, you have formed a hasty opinion.—How can you decide that you have no gifts, when you have never made



made any trial? But allowing your gifts to be exceeding small indeed, and that you could only utter a few broken and imperfect sentences at first, remember God looks at the heart: recollect also, that gifts grow by exercise and use. You may have the gift of prayer, but you have either not yet put it forth at all, or you have not persevered in the trial of it: I use, therefore, to you the language of an inspired apostle: "Wherefore  
 " I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up  
 " the gift of God which is in thee." 2 Tim. i. 6. Moses and Jeremiah both thought themselves destitute of gifts, and wished to decline the service to which God called them; the one saying,  
 " O my Lord! I am not eloquent, neither heretofore nor since thou hast spoken unto thy  
 " servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a  
 " slow tongue." Exod. iv. 10. And the other,  
 " Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak! for  
 " I am a child." Jer. i. 6. But the Lord encouraged them to undertake the work, and he was with them, and blessed them. Admitting that, like Moses, thou art not eloquent; that, like Jeremiah, thou art but a child; be not discouraged; call thy children and thy servants around thee, do it in the strength of the Lord, and he will enlarge thy heart; he will open thy mouth to speak, and perfect his own praise out of thy weakness; he will shew thee to thy comfort, that it is in his power to make the stammerer  
 speak



Speak plainly, and him that was even dumb to possess the tongue of the learned.

But it may be, that your hindrance is neither want of time nor want of gifts, but you have some in your family who would set their faces against all such religious exercises. This may be only your own apprehension; neither your partner, nor your children, nor your servants, might even once object to it; or if they disliked it ever so much, you have no alternative; the path of duty is plain before you; your authority is absolute in your family, and whether it will please or displease them, you should say, "As for me  
"and my house, we will serve the Lord." Address yourself, then, to that honourable line of action which we are now marking out for you; much of the opposition and discouragement you anticipate will be found imaginary; remember, in pursuing this course, you will act up to your character as the head of a Christian family, you will obey God, and may expect that he who turneth the heart of man whithersoever he pleaseth, will make your way plain, and both prosper and establish the work of your hands. If, however, the resistance should be equal to all you expect, the law of God and the law of conscience bind you not to make any sinful concessions. Beware how you suffer natural affection and the love of peace to turn you aside from the practice of a well-known and important duty; persevere in the  
good

good work, in the face of all opposition, whether it appear in the reproachful word, the contemptuous sneer, or the rebellious action; the Lord may in time, by your instrumentality, bring the opposers to a better judgment, and to a more devotional spirit.

After all, the most powerful and successful hindrances to this duty, in most of the heads of families where it is neglected, arise from their own hearts. Pride, shame, and the fear of man, operate but too powerfully upon the human mind; and, it is to be feared, have kept too many from commencing the practice of family prayer. It is worst of all where it arises from a total want of the spirit of prayer, and an entire neglect of closet devotion. He cannot reasonably be expected to become a mouth to God for his family, who never speaks to God in prayer for the salvation of his own soul; but if God assists him to be frequent and importunate in prayer for this in the closet, it will gradually prepare him for the exercise of prayer in his family.

Obs. V. *Family devotion has been productive of much good, both in a moral and religious point of view.*

To some, this instituted mode of instruction, like all the rest of the means of grace, may yield no advantage. As there are some spots of ground so completely sterile and barren, that no culture

can

can make them fruitful, so there are some hearts so blind and callous, that the wisest instructions, the devoutest prayers, and the holiest example, can never produce any impression upon them. Notwithstanding we have the grief to see some who have been trained up in the most religious manner casting off all the restraints which their education had laid them under, and becoming seven times more the children of the world and Satan than they were before, yet we are sure that the Lord does abundantly bless family devotion; it is productive of blessings to individuals, to the church, and to the country.

1. God has blessed it to individuals. It is not at all improbable that the servant of Abraham, who was sent to take a wife for Isaac, had reaped some profit from his master's pious instructions and humble supplications at a throne of grace; for whilst on his way to fulfil his master's commands, he directs this suitable and earnest petition to Heaven: "O Lord God of my master Abraham! I pray thee send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham." Gen. xxiv. 12. If Abraham had not been a praying master, he might never have been blessed with this praying servant, who applied himself with so much activity and zeal to the duties of his station. Many individuals have entered into the service of praying families, ignorant, indolent, and unholy; yea, mere eye-servants; and  
God



God has changed them into such praying, diligent, and faithful ones, as this of Abraham.

Family religion was not without its influence upon the mind of Joseph. The instructions and prayers of his godly father had produced in his mind such a strong sense of the evil of sin, and such a holy fear of offending God, that, though but a young man, and, in the situation he occupied in Potiphar's house, capable of receiving many advantages from the favour and friendship of his profligate mistress, yet he was enabled to withstand her criminal solicitations, accompanying his refusal with the following suitable and energetic expostulation: "Behold, my master  
 " wotteth not what is with me in the house, and  
 " he hath committed all that he hath to my  
 " hand. There is none greater in this house  
 " than I; neither hath he kept back any thing  
 " from me but thee, because thou art his wife.  
 " How then can I do this great wickedness, and  
 " sin against God?" Gen. xxxix. 8, 9. Carrying with him into Egypt the true favour of that religion, the knowledge and experience of which he had obtained at the foot of his father's family altar, he was equally faithful to his earthly as to his heavenly master.

Young Timothy also profited much at a very early period of his life by those religious exercises of which he was a witness and partaker. It was his blessing, that his grandmother Lois, and his



mother Eunice, were both partakers of "unfeigned faith," 2 Tim. i. 5.; and it is fairly to be inferred, that it was from their united instructions and prayers that Paul was able to say of him, "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures." 2 Tim. iii. 15. How well did this godly young man repay the tender care and religious instructions of his pious relations! and what an inducement should this be to all good men to teach and pray with the family over which God has placed them!

2. Religious exercises in the family prove beneficial to the church. Christian societies are considerably strengthened and increased by this holy practice. Some of us who are here to-day feel the strongest obligations imaginable to those godly parents, who, by causing us to kneel by their side at a family altar, taught us to adore and bless the eternal God as our creator and redeemer. We recollect with pleasure the seriousness of their manner, and the fervour of their supplications, together with the holiness of their lives: these things became instrumental in exciting in our minds some inquiries about God and eternity, raised some convictions upon our consciences on account of sin, and influenced us sometimes to try to pray for ourselves. We have heard it confessed by those who have entered into church fellowship with us, that they never thought of, nor felt the least concern about the

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the salvation of their souls, until the Lord brought them into families where the scriptures were read every day, and in which prayer was offered to the God of heaven.

But provided it could be proved, that neither children nor servants had ever been brought to the knowledge of the truth, directly or entirely, by means of family devotions, yet how much may they tend to facilitate the objects proposed by the public institutions of the sanctuary! We cannot but think, that both the understandings and the consciences of those who are branches of religious families are more accessible to the outward ministrations of the truth than others; though we are assured that all are alike so to God when he is pleased to say, "Ephphatha, that is, Be opened." Mark, vii. 34.

3. Family devotions ultimately prove beneficial to the country in which they abound. The head of every prayerless family contributes much to the infidelity and irreligion of the times. Children and servants are told by his example that religion is a thing of no importance, that there is no great need of going either to church or meeting on the Lord's day; and that God is too merciful to be angry with our devoting, at least a part of it, to pleasure and visiting; and even some who would be thought to be good Christians and rigid moralists, frequently inveigh against what they call a *puritanical observation of the sabbath*. Pro-

vided they give some part of the day to devotion, they think they may spend the evening very innocently at the nearest and most fashionable promenade, or in some snug convivial party; and whilst they are thus employed, their servants and their children also are roving at large, "as sheep having no shepherd," imbibing habits and forming connexions which ultimately make them bad members of the community.

But look at the family in which God is truly known and feared, the heads of which instruct and pray with their children, dependants, and domestics, and urge upon them the great doctrines of Christianity, and those pure morals which result from the knowledge and experience of it in the soul. The subordinate branches of such families are every evening kept out of the common and crowded haunts of ignorance and vice, and are occupied in services which not only bear some relation to the interests of their immortal souls, but which have also a tendency to form them into wise, industrious, and useful citizens. In short, wherever family devotions are conducted in a proper manner, and produce their proper effects, the family becomes orderly, united, and industrious; it is indeed, in a degree, an emblem of that society above, where neither discord nor misery ever enter. Such families are the beauty and the strength of society: may the Lord abundantly increase their number!

I shall

I shall now conclude with an endeavour to make some improvement of this subject, by addressing myself to several descriptions of hearers.

1. To you who never have practised the duty of family prayer. Let me entreat you to reflect seriously upon the subject; and to weigh the few plain hints which have now been given you upon it. Oh that this might be the happy day in which you shall be brought to say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" May the Lord give you grace and strength to put this holy resolution into practice. Don't be deterred any longer from a line of conduct which your judgment approves as excellent, and which your conscience commands as a duty. Now let your children and servants be called round you to hear you read the holy scriptures, and ask God's blessing upon them, both in providence and grace. Make no more vain excuses, listen no more to the suggestions of your unbelieving heart, which seems to whisper, "there is a lion in the way." I am calling you to a service which you cannot continue to neglect, without, in the most direct manner, violating the duty you owe to God, to your family, to the church, and to your country. Arise, then; consult no longer with flesh and blood; try to pray with your family in the strength of the Lord, and you will surely find that God will be mouth and wisdom unto you. If, however, you cannot prevail



upon yourself to do it extempore, take advantage of the helps which some good men have provided \*.

2. I address myself to the younger part of my audience. You are looking forward to the day when you shall remove from under the watchful eye and the protecting wing of a tender and godly parent, either to a temporary absence for the purpose of obtaining the knowledge of some useful calling, or to a more permanent one by marriage. In either case, permit me to remind you that your first care, as well as the first care of your parents, should be to secure to you the advantages of family prayer. Those serious impressions which you have received through the medium of a religious education, should be cherished by every possible means; and you cannot be sufficiently thankful to God, if he has blessed you with parents whose constant effort has been to place you in connexions where these advantages may be perpetuated: the want of them has proved highly injurious to many.

Some of you, it may be, are of a very different mind: instead of being sensible of the mercy of being placed in a praying family, it is your burden and grief; you like your situation in every respect but this; indeed, this is your daily cross; and you scarcely ever bow your knee in family devotion, but your hearts murmur, "What a wearis-

\* Doddridge and Jenks.

" nefs is it ! " Oh that the Lord would give you a better mind ; make you one of his spiritual family upon earth ; and then give you a portion with the family in glory ! You must be one of the former if ever you are brought to share the blessedness of the latter ; and if ever you are made a son or daughter of the Lord God Almighty, you will love to dwell in praying families ; and if brought to be the head of a family yourself, you will say with Joshua, " As for me and my house, " we will serve the Lord."

3. To those parents and masters who practise the duty of family prayer, we say, Be careful to maintain a mild but vigorous discipline over the subordinate branches of your family. We have seen some devout and godly parents, who have not been without some regard to the eternal welfare of their families, and who have prayed much with and for them, who have, nevertheless, lost the fruit of their labour by holding the reins of family government too slackly. We see one striking proof of this in good old Eli, against whom God uttered this awful sentence : " I have told him " that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth ; because his sons " made themselves vile, and he restrained them " not." 1 Sam. iii. 13. Eli was a good man ; he was a godly parent ; he did shew some concern for the wickedness of his sons, and reprov'd them in the following manner : " Why do ye these  
 o 4 " things ?

“ things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all  
 “ this people. Nay, my sons, for it is no good  
 “ report that I hear; ye make the Lord’s people  
 “ to transgress.” 1 Sam. ii. 23, 24. But he did  
 not shew that holy zeal, either in his reproofs  
 or his opposition to them, which his parental au-  
 thority warranted, and which jealousy for the  
 glory of God, and the good of their souls, ren-  
 dered indispensably necessary.

We have another instance of parental neglect  
 in David, at least towards his son Adonijah (if  
 not towards all the rest of his children, which is  
 very probable): it is said of him, that “his fa-  
 “ ther had not displeased him at any time in say-  
 “ ing, Why hast thou done so?” 1 Kings, i. 6.  
 This is a singular instance of criminal indulgence  
 in so good a man as David, and he lived long  
 enough to read his sin in his punishment—Amnon  
 proving an incestuous person, Absalom a mur-  
 derer, and Adonijah an usurper; beside which,  
 they every one came to an untimely end. Let  
 Christian parents learn from these sad instances,  
 that it is not enough to pray for and with their  
 children, but they should also aim to curb their  
 rising passions, and discountenance every practice  
 which in the slightest degree infringes upon the  
 laws of morality and religion.

It is also peculiarly necessary that heads of re-  
 ligious families should walk circumspectly as to  
 their tempers and actions. Children and servants

can soon discern the inconsistency, when they see their superiors make devout prayers, and yet remain under the power of unsanctified tempers, and an irregular walk and conversation : in cases of this nature, the effect of instruction and prayer is always weakened, if it be not utterly destroyed.

I shall finish with exhorting you that are heads of Christian families steadily to persevere in a devout attention to family prayer, and not to be discouraged under an idea that it is not profitable, because you have not yet seen its effects : “ In  
 “ the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening  
 “ withhold not thy hand, for thou knowest not  
 “ whether shall prosper, either this or that, or  
 “ whether they both shall be alike good.” Eccl. xi. 6. You may not live to see its success ; God may try your faith and patience in this respect ; but since it has in many instances proved effectual after a long interval, this should strengthen your faith and encourage your hope, and keep alive in each heart the solemn determination of the text, “ As for me and my house, we will serve the  
 “ Lord.” God grant all the heads of families this grace, for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.



## S E R M O N VII.

## CLOSET PRAYER.



MATT. xiv. 23.

*And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come he was there alone.*

THE original design of man's creation was, that he might "glorify God, and enjoy him "for ever;" and for this he was abundantly qualified in his first state, by being made in the express image of God. The introduction of sin has not only stripped him of his glory, but it has brought him under a moral incapacity of attaining either of those objects of himself; for, instead of directing any of his efforts towards them, he endeavours to satisfy his soul with creature enjoyments, and lives in a state of open rebellion against his Creator and Benefactor, despising his authority and breaking his holy law, insolently  
braving

braving all the threatenings denounced against impenitent sinners.

To redress this tremendous evil, and bring man back again to delight in and obey God, Jesus Christ came into our world. The object proposed in this event is, "to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons; and because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father!" Gal. iv. 5, 6. If we are brought into this interesting state, let us remember it has duties as well as privileges attached to it; and conscious of this, we shall be ready to cry out with David, "Teach me to do thy will," Psa. cxliii. 10.; and with Paul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Acts, ix. 6.

The duty which the children of God owe to their heavenly Father, is in some measure naturally to be inferred from the relation itself, as well as from the precepts of the word, and the example of Jesus Christ. He often proposed his own temper and actions as the model, after which all his disciples should copy: "Learn of me," was a maxim which Jesus Christ constantly inculcated. It was his meat and his drink to do the will of his heavenly Father; and it is worthy the particular notice of Christians, how wisely and how zealously Jesus Christ applied himself to all the duties of his station. In the duties of his ministerial office he was indefatigable, going from  
city

city to city, teaching the ignorant, and healing the sick and dying; and yet the multitude and variety of his public services neither prevented his spending a social hour among the families to which his disciples stood related, nor his finding opportunity for secret devotion. For this, Christ was singularly eminent. In his practice we see beautifully illustrated that maxim of Solomon, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." Eccl. iii. 1.

An old divine used to say, three things were requisite to make a good minister: "meditation, temptation, and prayer." In our glorious Head, all these were peculiarly exemplified, and every true minister of his will have some acquaintance with them. Christian ministers should especially be much in the practice of closet devotion; their work is a very important and arduous work, and they are very insufficient of themselves. They need the assistance of God's Spirit in preparing for the pulpit; they need also his help and unction in the delivery of what they have prepared, that they may experience the power of recollection; that they may be aided in the delivery to find out acceptable words, to speak from the heart with a strong affection to the souls of the hearers; and an humble dependance upon the Holy Spirit, that the word may be carried home to the consciences of ignorant, careless sinners,

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as it was in the case of the Theſſalonians, of whom Paul thus ſpeaks: “ Our goſpel came not  
 “ unto you in word only, but alſo in power, and  
 “ in the Holy Ghoſt, and in much aſſurance.”

1 Theſſ. i. 5. No diligence in the preparation, no wiſdom in the arrangement, no zeal or eloquence in the delivery of ſermons, will make them effectual to enlighten, awaken, and convert ſouls, without the ſpecial bleſſing of God. Paul ſpeaks wiſely upon this ſubject when he ſays, “ So  
 “ then neither is he that planteth any thing, nei-  
 “ ther he that watereth, but God who giveth the  
 “ increaſe.” 1 Cor. iii. 7. It is the ſtrong ſenſe which the true miniſters of Chriſt have of this truth which urges them to be much in prayer to God in the cloſet, that they may not be left alone in the pulpit, but that, having God’s preſence and aſſiſtance, they may do the work of God with fidelity and ſucceſs.

If Jeſus Chriſt found it needful and advantageous to engage in retired devotion, how much more ſo muſt it be for ſuch weak and imperfect creatures as we are, not only miniſters, but private Chriſtians alſo? May I be enabled ſo to ſpeak of this ſubject, as to engage ſome to adopt it who have heretofore neglected it, and ſtimulate others to continue it with growing pleaſure and more abundant profit. We ſhall aim to accompliſh theſe deſirable ends, by ſhewing you the nature and grounds of this duty—the manner and ſpirit  
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in which it should be performed—the particular objects in relation to which it is practised—the difficulty of a constant and successful attention to it—and the blessings which arise from it to the real Christian.

First : Closet, or secret prayer, is a very important branch of Christian duty, and as such is much spoken of in the scriptures, from whence we shall derive all our reflections concerning the nature and grounds of it. It has its name from the manner in which the great Head of the church himself recommended it in the following words :  
 “ But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy  
 “ closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray  
 “ to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Fa-  
 “ ther which seeth in secret shall reward thee  
 “ openly.” Matt. vi. 6. In this passage the duty of closet prayer is plainly and strongly inculcated ; and what we are to gather from the phraseology of it is, not that it is essential to be in a closet or room when we individually pray to God, but that we should find some season and place of retirement, where we may pour out our souls with the utmost freedom before Him whose eye seeth the inmost recesses of the heart.

Next to the precept which we have just cited, secret prayer is most strongly recommended by the example of Jesus Christ. He had no sooner dismissed the multitude, whom he had fed with five loaves and two fishes, although composed of

five thousand men, beside women and children ; and constrained his disciples to get into a ship ; than he himself, the text tells us, “ went up “ into a mountain apart to pray ;” thus exemplifying and recommending his own injunction by the power of his example. Nor is this the only instance in which particular notice is taken of the private devotions of Jesus Christ ; he was often thus employed, and in various places. We may judge of the nature and fervour of his secret prayers, when we recollect that one scripture tells us he “ continued all night in prayer to God,” Luke, vi. 12. ; and another speaks of his having “ offered up prayers and supplications with strong “ crying and tears unto Him that was able to save “ him from death, and was heard in that he “ feared.” Heb. v. 7. Oh that the same spirit and power which pervaded the prayers of Jesus may be more abundantly experienced in our closet devotions !

Frequent prayer to God in secret has been practised by the saints of God in every age ; we find many instances of it among the patriarchs, especially Jacob, who fought his God with so much success at Bethel, and also at Peniel. The prophets also, from Samuel to Malachi, were men who practised this duty, especially Daniel, who braved the danger of death rather than give up the privilege of calling upon his God in his own habitation. The practice was also continued  
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under New Testament times, and that by an authority and example the most winning and operative upon the hearts of genuine Christians. It is not improbable that the holy man Nathaniel was engaged in secret devotions in that secluded spot of which Christ speaks in John, i. 48. "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." We have a striking particular related of one of Christ's disciples, who obeyed the command and followed the example of his Master: Acts, x. 9.: "Peter went up upon the house-top to pray, about the sixth hour."

Some of us have had this duty recommended by the precepts and example of godly parents; whom, without being observed, we have heard pray, while we have been the subjects of their fervent and devout supplications. They have told us of the necessity and usefulness of this holy practice, and charged upon us a due regard to it, if we wished to be preserved from evil, and to be enriched in soul with much of the presence, fear, and enjoyment of God. Out of veneration for their pious injunction and example, we might, some of us, for a time, have regarded the mere external duty; but now, it may be, grace has made an essential difference in our spiritual state; we regard it upon very different principles, and to very different ends; now we find it a privilege; we find it good to draw near to God; our peace, our joy,



joy, our holiness, are all enlarged and strengthened by the nearness of our access to God: yea, there are times when our seasons of intercourse with God have been so pleasing, so enchanting, that, like Jacob, the soul has cried out, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved," Gen. xxxii. 30.; or, like Peter on the mount, "Lord, it is good (for us) to be here!" Matt. xvii. 4.

We say of closet prayer, which is recommended to us upon such high authority as that of which we have been speaking, that it is an important and indispensable part of religion. It is not of such little consequence in our general sphere of action in the church, that a man may or may not make conscience of it, without at all affecting his character or his prosperity as a Christian. This species of prayer is inseparable from a state of grace; it is one of the first, one of the plainest and strongest symptoms of spiritual life. When the rays of heavenly light had entered the long benighted understanding, and the power of saving grace had truly awakened and humbled the carnal heart of Saul of Tarsus, it was then said of him, "Behold, he prayeth." Acts, ix. 11. He had doubtless repeated and said many prayers in times past; but it was not till Christ met with him in the way to Damascus, and caused him to see and feel what a vile sinner he was in himself, and what a gracious and glorious Saviour he was

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rejecting and persecuting, that he ever prayed in spirit and in truth. Now he stands abashed with holy shame, and agitated from head to foot with terror, which is infused into his soul by the awful scene which presents itself to his view, and by the majesty of that voice which cries, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Acts, ix. 4. From that hour he became a man of prayer; a seeker of God, not only in public worship, but also in private; and thus he imitated his Divine Master.

In our closet devotions we have the most free and unrestrained intercourse with God. Every heart knows its own bitterness. The Christian has trials, conflicts, and temptations, all which he can spread before the Lord, and before him only. It is in this exercise alone that he can fully unbosom himself before the Lord, confessing all his ignorance, weakness, and sinfulness, and earnestly imploring suitable measures of wisdom and grace.

Secondly: The manner and spirit in which this duty should be performed. When a Christian retires from the company and converse of his fellow-creatures, for the express purpose of addressing himself individually to God in prayer, the action itself seems to say, "Thou God seekest me." It contains an express acknowledgment, that God is always near and present with us, and that real religion consists in our having peace with God, and being permitted to approach him as a friend  
and

and father, to ask his counsel in seasons of embarrassment, and his assistance in times of distress and trouble.

From this view of the subject it follows, that our closet devotions should be solemn and devout, because we approach a great God, who cannot be deceived, and who will not be mocked. They should be cheerful and unreserved, because they are presented to a God who takes delight in his people's approaching to him. Even to the weakest and most insufficient of his children he says, in his holy word, "Let me see thy countenance, "let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice, "and thy countenance is comely." S. Song, ii. 14. From such encouraging portions of scripture, Christians should be stimulated to be incessant, importunate, and confident in secret prayer; the more so, since Christ has accompanied his injunction to secret prayer with this gracious promise, "Thy Father which seeth in secret shall "reward thee openly." Matt. vi. 6.

When Christians seclude themselves from the world for the special purpose of praying to their God and Father, they may to this duty very suitably join others; such as reading the holy scriptures: not reading any certain or precise portion of them as mere matter of duty, but searching and studying them as the revealed will of God, and as containing truths of infinite importance to the souls of men. We should read the Bible

to "hear what God the Lord will speak, "for he will speak peace to his saints." Psa. lxxxv. 8. We should read it in our closets, in order to know what we ought to believe, and what we ought to do; to learn how to think, speak, and act, in harmony with our high character as the children of God; above all, to know what it is to be a real Christian, and whether we are such; that, having an assurance of eternal life, we may go on our way rejoicing.

2. We should unite with private prayer the profitable duty of meditation. To practise and enjoy this, Isaac went out into the field at the eventide, Gen. xxiv. 63.: it is not unlikely but he mingled secret prayer with his meditations. Nature, providence, and grace, each present an instructive volume to our view; the last of these especially furnishes the Christian with an important and exalted theme. The constitution of the person of Christ, the things he has done and suffered for perishing sinners; the rich blessings he has procured for them that believe on his name; all afford a rich source of meditation to the serious Christian; and if he meditate on them with a believing heart, they will excite in his soul the most lively and elevated sensations of spiritual pleasure.

3. Above all, we should not neglect the duty of self-examination. The season of retirement is the proper season of inquiry into the state of our



souls. We shall not converse with God to much profit in our closets, if we do not sometimes converse with ourselves: "Prove your own selves," 2 Cor. xiii. 5. is an apostolic exhortation. Through the neglect of this, too many mere professors judge well of their own state, and deceive their own souls, whilst too many real Christians doubt their interest in Christ and eternal life, and go mourning and complaining all the way through this wilderness.

In the management of this part of religious duty we have no precise law to guide us, as to its frequency, or the express time at which it should be performed: David speaks thus upon the subject: "Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud, and he shall hear my voice," Psa. lv. 17.; and of Daniel it is said, that "he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." Dan. vi. 10. Many Christians take these holy men as patterns, and statedly retire to their closets at the times mentioned; whilst others confine themselves to morning and evening, as to the stated seasons of calling upon God in secret, and also embrace casual opportunities as they arise.

Let us then diligently attend to closet religion, and to the manner and spirit in which it is carried on. This is a true barometer by which to judge of the general state of religion in our souls: if



things are right between God and our souls in the closet, we shall feel the advantage of it in every step of our journey towards that "better country" to which all real Christians are bound; but if it go ill with us there, it will be productive of innumerable disadvantages to us; our souls will be indisposed for more public devotions; they will easily be dejected and disturbed by the cares and trials of life, and become an easy prey to the snares and temptations with which they are surrounded.

Thirdly: The particular objects in relation to which it is practised. Considered as a stated and regular medium of intercourse with God, it has to do with the progress of our souls in knowledge, grace, and holiness, and the obtaining guidance and assistance from him in all seasons of peculiar need.

I. There are some particular occasions in regard to which this duty may be practised to advantage. Abraham's servant, when he was in pursuit of a very important object, in which the happiness of his master's whole family was deeply involved, made use of his interest with God at a throne of grace, to obtain the guidance of the Divine counsel, that he might prosper in the object of his journey.

Those professing Christians who propose to enter into new connexions in life, would do well to consider the importance of such a step, and make it

it the subject of closet prayer; left, being left to their own judgments, they should consult their temporal interest above that which is spiritual and eternal, and thereby find a curse instead of a blessing.

We should also ask God's counsel and blessing when entering upon any new calling in life. It is not improbable but it was on some such account that "Jabez called on the God of Israel," saying, "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, " and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand " might be with, and that thou wouldest keep " me from evil, that it may not grieve me." 1 Chron. iv. 10. This is a suitable prayer for a religious tradesman, who should know and remember that, unless the Lord bless the work of his hand, no skill, no industry of his will insure prosperity.

If God prosper us in life, or grant us any particular or special comfort, we should retire to our closets, and beseech him to give us wisdom and grace to manage our affairs with discretion, and in such wise as to subserve his glory and our soul's interest. We have an example of this in a good man of old, to whom God had promised a son, in the expectation of whom he was led to put up this prayer: "Then Manoah entreated the Lord, and " said, O my Lord! let the man of God which " thou didst send come again unto us, and teach " us what we shall do unto the child that shall " be born." Judges, xiii. 8.

Private prayer has been offered to God by good men on account of a great variety of domestic circumstances—thus, “ Isaac entreated the Lord “ for his wife because she was barren, and the “ Lord was entreated of him.” Gen. xxv. 21. And David also, when the Lord laid his hand upon the child born to him by Bathsheba, “ besought God for the child; and fasted and lay “ all night upon the earth.” 2 Sam. xii. 16. Prayer should be united with all the principal occurrences of social life; and our way is likely to be tranquil, if not successful, when in every thing we ask counsel of God, and depend upon his assistance and blessing to make it prosper.

II. There are some particular seasons in which Christians should be much in private prayer. It should precede, accompany, and follow our attendance upon public ordinances: we have an example for this in Jesus Christ himself, of whom it is said, “ It came to pass, that Jesus also being “ baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened.” Luke, iii. 21. We have no reason to expect any real edification from the means, except we pray to God for his blessing upon them; like the waters of Bethesda’s pool, they have no healing virtue in them, unless the angel of the Lord come down and trouble them.

Again: In times of affliction we should be very frequent in our closet devotions. In a time of great affliction how encouraging is that promise,

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mise, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, I  
 "will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me,"  
 Psa. l. 15.; and the scriptures abound with ex-  
 amples. When Sampson was in danger of pe-  
 rishing with thirst, he "called on the Lord:  
 "and the Lord clave an hollow place that was  
 "in the jaw, and there came water thereout."  
 Judges, xv. 18, 19. When Hezekiah was sick  
 unto death, he "prayed unto the Lord, and he  
 "spake unto him, and gave him a sign." 2 Chron.  
 xxxii. 24. When Paul was sorely pressed by the  
 temptations and buffetings of Satan, he "be-  
 "sought the Lord thrice; and the Lord an-  
 "swered him, and said, My grace is sufficient for  
 "thee." 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

Christians should be much in the closet in times  
 of public calamity. The exhortation given of  
 old to the church at large is not inapplicable to  
 individual saints: "Come, my people, enter thou  
 "into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about  
 "thee; hide thyself as it were for a little mo-  
 "ment, until the indignation be overpast." Isa.  
 xxvi. 20. When the cupbearer of Artaxerxes  
 heard of the afflicted state of the remnant of his  
 people, "he sat down and wept, and mourned  
 "certain days, and fasted and prayed before the  
 "God of heaven." Neh. i. 4. Joshua, and Daniel,  
 and David, all made conscience of making hum-  
 ble and fervent prayer to God whilst the nation  
 and the church were under his afflicting hand.

Also



Also in times when there is a great departure among professed believers from the knowledge, experience, and practice of true religion ; then we should be much in our closets, praying that we ourselves may be preserved from the general contagion, and that the Lord would look down in mercy, and pardon and restore such as have departed from him. This remark was exemplified in the prophet, who thus addressed the Jews :  
 “ Give glory to the Lord your God before he  
 “ cause darkness, and before your feet stumble  
 “ upon the dark mountains, and while ye look  
 “ for light, he turn it into the shadow of death,  
 “ and make it gross darkness. But if ye will  
 “ not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places  
 “ for your pride, and mine eye shall weep sore  
 “ and run down with tears, because the Lord’s  
 “ flock is carried away captive.” Jer. xiii. 16, 17.

Once more : Seasons of suspense and embarrassment should lead us to much closet prayer. Sometimes the providences of God are of such a dark and mysterious nature, as to warrant good men to make them the particular subject of prayer : Daniel did this, and the Lord sent an angel to him, who said, “ Fear not, Daniel ; for  
 “ from the first day that thou didst set thine heart  
 “ to understand and to chasten thyself before  
 “ thy God, thy words were heard, and I am  
 “ come for thy words.” Dan. x. 12. Jesus himself, when under great embarrassment and agitation,

tion, was frequent and importunate in private prayer, as appears by the following passage:

“ Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding  
 “ sorrowful even unto death; tarry ye here, and  
 “ watch with me. And he went a little farther,  
 “ and fell on his face and prayed, saying, O my  
 “ father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from  
 “ me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou  
 “ wilt,” &c. Matt. xxvi. 38—44.

Lastly: The season of great ease and prosperity is a time when Christians should be much in secret prayer, because it is a state the most ensnaring and dangerous. We learn this truth from the testimony of the word of God. One passage of scripture represents a good man not only praying to be delivered from the evil of poverty and affliction, but also from riches, and assigns this reason: “ Lest I be full, and deny thee.” Prov. xxx. 9. Another scripture gives this melancholy description of Israel: “ But Jeshurun waxed  
 “ fat and kicked; that art waxen fat, thou art  
 “ grown thick, thou art covered with fatness:  
 “ then he forsook God which made him, and  
 “ lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation.” Deut. xxxii. 15. If we would not fall into the same evil, in times of ease and prosperity, let us be much in communion with God in secret.

III. Good men should be much with God in their closets when they are about to enter upon services of a difficult and dangerous nature, or  
 services

services which cannot be brought to a successful issue without the special presence and blessing of God. It is good in all cases of emergency to ask the advice and counsel of good men, as to all those prudential measures which are suited to accomplish the end at which we aim, addressing them in such language as the children of Dan used to the Levite : " Ask counsel, we pray thee, " of God, that we may know whether our way " that we go shall be prosperous." Judges, xviii. 5. But if we would be guided in the path of duty, and assisted in all times of difficulty, let us consult God in our closets, and repose upon him an unshaken dependance, and we shall find the truth of that promise, " Commit thy way unto the Lord, " trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass ; " and he shall bring forth thy righteousness as " the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day." Psa. xxxvii. 5, 6. David was remarkable for his attention to this rule: when in want of advice, or in want of help and deliverance, he ran to a throne of grace, especially in the season of his being so dreadfully persecuted by Saul. We have one striking proof of it at the time David was at Keilah : " Then said David, O Lord God of " Israel ! thy servant hath certainly heard that " Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the " city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah " deliver me up into his hand ? Will Saul come " down, as thy servant hath heard ? O Lord God " of



" of Israel ! I beseech thee tell thy servant. And  
 " the Lord said, He will come down." 1 Sam.  
 xxiii. 10, 11. Ezra and Nehemiah, and many other  
 great men spoken of in the scriptures, and who  
 undertook and carried forward great designs for  
 the good of Zion, were men of much prayer,  
 and derived all the wisdom of their plans, and all  
 the success of their operations, from God through  
 this medium.

IV. The Lord's people should be more frequent  
 and more earnest in secret prayer, as they per-  
 ceive the approach of those great and interesting  
 events which are the express subject of prophecy.  
 Long have the saints been praying for the downfall  
 of Antichrist, " whom the Lord shall consume with  
 " the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with  
 " the brightness of his coming: even him whose  
 " coming is after the working of Satan, with all  
 " power, and signs, and lying wonders." 2 Thess.  
 ii. 8, 9. Those who have fallen martyrs to this  
*man of sin* are spoken of thus: " And when he  
 " had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the  
 " altar the souls of them that were slain for the  
 " word of God, and for the testimony which  
 " they held. And they cried with a loud  
 " voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and  
 " true, dost thou not judge and avenge our  
 " blood on them that dwell upon the earth?"  
 Rev. vi. 9, 10. Surely the great event alluded  
 to in these passages has already dawned; let us be  
 more



more frequent and earnest in our closets, that this root of bitterness may be utterly destroyed. O Lord! let not so much as the stump of this Dagon remain upon the earth. Surely there is room already for the church of Christ to take up that exultation, " True and righteous are his judgments; for he " hath judged the great whore which did corrupt " the earth with her fornication, and hath " avenged the blood of his servants at her hand." Rev. xix. 2.

The calling of the Jews and the fulness of the gentiles, are also events which are earnestly to be looked for. Our closets should witness the most devout and ardent repetition of such prayers as these: " Remember thy congregation which thou " hast purchased of old, the rod of thine inheritance which thou hast redeemed; this mount " Zion wherein thou hast dwelt. Have respect " unto the covenant; for the dark places of the " earth are full of the habitations of cruelty." Psa. lxxiv. 2. 20. These two glorious events, the salvation of Jews and gentiles, and the bringing them into one fold under the great Shepherd, are closely united in scripture prophecies; and who can tell but the eventful period in which we live may be that in which they shall begin to appear?—Let us at least wrestle with God that it may be so. Our eyes have seen, and our ears have heard, marvellous things of late: let this thought quicken our souls to a more lively exercise

ercise of faith and hope. Then shall come those peaceful, those happy days, of which the holy scriptures have spoken so much : “ They shall  
 “ beat their swords into ploughshares, and their  
 “ spears into pruning-hooks : nation shall not lift  
 “ up sword against nation, neither shall they learn  
 “ war any more.” Isa. ii. 4. The knowledge of  
 God shall be given to them that were in utter  
 darkness, the kingdom of Christ shall be set up  
 in every nation : yea, “ He shall come down like  
 “ rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water  
 “ the earth. In his days shall the righteous flou-  
 “ rish, and abundance of peace so long as the  
 “ moon endureth ; he shall have dominion also  
 “ from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends  
 “ of the earth.” Psa. lxxii. 6—8.

Our closets should also witness our frequent meditations upon the subject of Christ's second coming, the resurrection of the dead, and the final glory of the church in heaven. The prospect of this glorious event has gladdened the hearts, strengthened the faith, and animated the souls of many of God's dear children under the accumulated pressure of affliction and temptation ; and they have consequently been led to pray for it in the most devout and importunate manner ; whilst they heard the voice of Jesus whisper in his word, “ Behold I come quickly,” their hearts have subjoined, “ Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus.” Rev. xxii. 20.

We

We shall speak,

Fourthly, Concerning the difficulty of a constant and successful attention to closet prayer. There is not any thing naturally in the heart of a Christian to favour the regular and profitable discharge of religious duties ; on the contrary, it is too often either under the influence of a supine and indolent frame, or, which is much worse, there is a dislike and an aversion to them at some seasons ; nor is it probable, that this evil will be perfectly remedied whilst we carry about with us so much of that body of sin, of which the apostle Paul complains so heavily in the seventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. Though the heart of the Christian is capable of being indisposed, through the remains of human weakness and depravity, to every kind of religious exercise, it is liable, most of all, to be out of tune for this, because it has none of those outward attractions and inducements which apply to public and social duties, such as hearing the word, frequenting the Lord's table, and uniting with the saints in meetings of prayer, and also in the family. The omission of these is cognisable to the eye of our fellow-creatures ; there is also something in them to engage the outward attention, and even amuse the mind when indisposed towards them. But secret prayer is a duty which lies between God and the soul, and which cannot be practised with freedom and constancy without a serious and a heavenly frame  
of



of mind; it must, of course, be liable to many interruptions.

Having no outward attractions, when the soul is in a dark and stupified state, it will be disposed to neglect this part of religion; and this neglected, every thing else will go wrong in the Christian life. The great adversary of souls is so well persuaded of this, that his efforts are continually directed to this end: he knows that if he can keep the Christian out of his closet, or deaden, disturb, or distract him in the performance of closet duties, he has gained a great point against him: he therefore is not content with coming among the sons of God when they come together for public worship, as related Job i. 6.; but he stands at the closet-door to prevent the Christian's entering, or he rushes in with him, and stands at his right hand to resist him, as he did Joshua the high priest, Zech. iii. 1—3. But it is our mercy, as it was his, that we have an Advocate who can say with due authority and power, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan!"

If then we would be much with God in our closets, if we would hold a close and powerful intercourse with God in prayer, we must exercise ourselves much in the duty of watchfulness. We must shake off our natural sloth and indolence, and address ourselves to this holy and profitable exercise with an ardent and glowing zeal, because there are enemies to oppose it both within and



without. We must watch for opportunity, and seize it with avidity the moment it presents itself. "The time is not come," Hag. i. 2. is language that our unbelieving and sluggish souls will be too often disposed to adopt. We must watch over and against our own evil hearts: our enemies, in this case, our worst and most successful enemies, will be those of our own household. Let us then often read and earnestly pray over that exhortation, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Prov. iv. 23. We must beware of an undue intimacy with or attachment to those things which have a tendency either to keep us out of our closets, or to distract and hinder us when we are there; such as an inordinate love of the world, a sinful anxiety about things which are temporal, and the indulgence of any known and besetting sin. This, above all other duties of religion, cannot be maintained in its spirituality and vigour, unless there be a sincere and unreserved "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts." Titus, ii. 12. This made an inspired writer, in another place, say, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." Heb. xii. 1. We cannot walk with God in the way of Christian fellowship, till we are enabled to throw aside the entangling snares of the world and sin. The last branch of our subject is,

Fifthly,

Fifthly, The blessings which arise to the real Christian from closet prayer. Attended to in the manner and with the spirit which we have been describing, it cannot fail to be productive of the most beneficial effects to the Christian, both in his experience and in his practice. We all know what a desirable, what an advantageous thing it is, in times of great difficulty and distress to have an intimate, a bosom friend, with whom we can freely converse in respect to our affairs, and to whom we may unbosom ourselves, as to the rise, progress, and probable issue of our afflictions. If this be so desirable and pleasing in the common concerns of life, how much more so in regard to the things which concern our spiritual and eternal welfare! Yes, in God we have such a friend; from him we may expect counsel and advice, and we may assure ourselves of this delightful truth, that when we carry our sorrows and our cares to him at the throne of grace, we shall always find him at leisure to attend to us, and always possessed of ability to help us.

But suppose, after we have spread our case before God in the closet, and given it up to his entire management, we do not immediately perceive his interference on our behalf, we shall nevertheless derive advantage from carrying all our difficulties to our heavenly Father in secret, because it is said, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace  
" whose mind is stayed on thee, because he

“ trusteth in thee.” Isa. xxvi. 3. Christians who are often with God in secret prayer, find much of this in their experience; their minds are kept calm amidst the storms and tempests of life, quietly waiting and hoping for the salvation of God, knowing that it is said, “ In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct thy paths.” Prov. iii. 6.

From this holy exercise the Christian often returns as “ a giant refreshed with wine;” he returns strengthened in his inner man; he feels a heavenly vigour diffuse itself through all the powers of his renewed mind; if he be surrounded with trials and bereavements, he will bear them with a fortitude peculiar to a Christian; if he be called to perform duties of a difficult and dangerous nature, he will not reason with flesh and blood, but instantly apply himself to the punctual discharge of them, indifferent as to the personal disadvantages which may arise to himself, imitating, in a degree, the heroic conduct of Moses, of whom it is said, “ By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.” Heb. xi. 27.

Through an humble and spiritual converse with God in the closet, we shall derive an abundant measure of grace for our seasons of temptation. We have a vigilant and malignant adversary, whose buffetings we must experience all the way through this wilderness. There is nothing more  
 3 effectual



effectual to repel his fiery darts, and elude the snares which he lays to entangle our feet, than being much upon the mount in fellowship with Christ. It was because of this, that Christ so often repeated, in one form or another, the substance of the following exhortation: "Watch" and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Matt. xxvi. 41. All the while we keep close to God in a life of secret prayer we walk safely, and resist Satan in a vigorous and successful manner: but no sooner do we, like Peter, follow Christ afar off, than we fall an easy prey to the temptations of our inveterate foe: then, like Sampson shorn of his locks, we become weak as other men.

Being much with God in our closets, is calculated to produce an advancement of the power of genuine holiness in our hearts, and the universal and perpetual practice of it in our lives. It is an old and well-established maxim, that "Praying will either make a man leave off sinning, or else sinning will make him leave off praying." There is no maintaining a life of intimate fellowship with God in the closet, and living at the same time in the indulgence of any known sin: the love of the world is, to a life of communion with God, what the little worm was to Jonah's much-loved gourd. What a blighting east wind is to the fruits of the earth, such is the influence of the love of sin upon the prosperity of the soul; but



a life of near access to God, operating upon the whole of our Christian walk and conversation, as the rays of the sun and the gentle showers of rain upon the earth, make them abundantly fruitful.

To conclude: Nothing keeps the mind of a real Christian in such a state of actual and habitual preparation for the whole will of God, as that branch of religion of which we are now speaking. We apply this reflection principally to the Christian's prospect of entering into eternity. As from the top of Pisgah, Moses was privileged to view the land of promise; so the Christian, from the mount on which he is privileged to converse with God in prayer, is at times enabled to look at the true Canaan; and whilst he surveys its beauty, he feels the influence of that flame which glowed in the breast of the apostle when he said, "Having a desire to depart" "and be with Christ, which is far better." Phil. i. 23.

In aiming to improve this subject, I address myself,

1. To you who never retire from the cares and company of this world, either to converse with God, or direct your thoughts towards another. You are, in the fullest sense of the word, a prayerless person; you rise up in the morning, pass through the day, and lie down again at night, as prayerless as the brute creation. You not only never pray yourself, but you despise and hate those

those who do, esteeming them fools and madmen, mocking them in some such manner as Ishmael did Isaac; for "as then, he that was "born after the flesh persecuted him that was "born after the spirit, even so it is now." Gal. iv. 29. Is it possible that you can believe the being of a God, since you never acknowledge his goodness, or supplicate his blessing? Can you believe the scriptures to be a revelation from God, when you live in the total neglect of a duty which is inculcated, either in precept or in example, in almost every page? Is it possible for you so egregiously to mistake the tenour of the word of God, and the state of your own soul, as to think yourself a Christian, notwithstanding you never enter your closet to bow your knee and prostrate your spirit before the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Be not deceived upon this point; the word of God has united in one awful list those who are "the workers of iniquity," and those who "called not upon the "Lord." Psa. xiv. 4.

Careless sinner, we address you in the strong and encouraging language of the prophet: "Seek "ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye "upon him while he is near." Isa. lv. 6. Even wicked men are brought to pray at last, but it is too often when God has said, "They shall call "upon me, but I will not answer; they shall "seek me early, but they shall not find me."

Prov. i. 28. Such is the prayer of the impenitent sinner in sickness and death, the terror of whose conscience constrains and forces him to ask the grace and mercy which, all through life, he has trampled under foot with impunity. Jesus Christ gives an awful description of those who should finally supplicate God without success: "Afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us! But he answered and said, Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.'" Matt. xxv. 11, 12.

2. To others of you I may address the following scripture: "Thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God." Job, xv. 4. You have not always neglected private prayer; it may be, that you was influenced to practise it for a time when young, through the influence of those precepts and examples which were placed before you; but you no sooner removed from under the restraints to which young persons are subject, and were left totally to your own inclination, and began to launch out into the company and pleasures of the world, than you abandoned it as an useless and inconvenient thing: or perhaps you were led to adopt the practice of private prayer when you was in sickness and trouble, or apprehensive of the hour of dissolution; but with returning health and prosperity you returned to a prayerless and irreligious course of life. How truly may it be said of such a person, "the last state  
" of



“ of that man is worse than the first !” Luke, xi. 26. Those who finally apostatize from Christianity seldom do it in a sudden and instantaneous manner: their infidelity and irreligion are generally progressive; they begin in the indulgence of some criminal passion; this indisposes the mind for closet devotions; these forsaken, public ordinances are attended in a very loose and partial manner, and the carnal professor finishes his career by sitting down in “ the seat of the scornful,” and labouring hard to fortify his conscience against all the inroads of conviction, by the vain and wicked opinion, that there is no truth in the Christian religion. Thus he who forsakes closet prayer takes, at least, one step towards the dark and inhospitable regions of infidelity.

3. To the real Christian who practises closet prayer, both as a duty and a privilege, we use the language of congratulation. God has graciously brought you to an acquaintance with that part of religion which has a mighty effect upon every branch of the Christian life. You find it by experience to be so important, that you cannot do without it. Through this holy and blessed exercise you find your soul eased of its burdens, refreshed when ready to faint through the difficulties of the way, and supported and preserved when in danger of being overcome by the numbers and strength of your spiritual enemies. Though this is the happy effect, in general, of a  
 life



life of secret prayer, yet you must not be surpris'd if you find seasons in which you will enter your closet reluctantly, and return from it discouraged and distressed, on account of the darkness, deadness, and wanderings of your heart. Let not this cast you down, but rather take occasion from it to look forward with greater earnestness towards, and anticipate with greater pleasure, that world, where our communion with God shall be perfect in its nature and eternal in its duration. To the full possession of this blessedness may every one of us at last arrive, through the infinitely meritorious work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be honour and glory for ever. *Amen.*

## SERMON VIII.

## EJACULATORY PRAYER.

Acts, vii. 59.

*Lord Jesus! receive my spirit.*

**T**HOUGH the world is divided into many distinct nations, who speak different languages, and who follow an infinite variety of customs both civil and religious, yet they are all reduced in scripture to two classes—they are all either the children of light or the children of darkness—they are all either the servants of God and righteousness, or they are the servants of Satan and sin. There are no characters, either in the profane or professing world, distinct from or between these two.

These two great bodies are governed by two distinct leaders. The multitude of them that believe and worship God in spirit and truth are the children of God, and are placed under the direction and influence of Jesus Christ, who is  
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life of secret prayer; yet you must not be surprised if you find seasons in which you will enter your closet reluctantly, and return from it discouraged and distressed, on account of the darkness, deadness, and wanderings of your heart. Let not this cast you down, but rather take occasion from it to look forward with greater earnestness towards, and anticipate with greater pleasure, that world, where our communion with God shall be perfect in its nature and eternal in its duration. To the full possession of this blessedness may every one of us at last arrive, through the infinitely meritorious work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be honour and glory for ever. *Amen.*

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said to be "the head over all things to the church." Eph. i. 22. Of those who forget God and work iniquity it is said, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." John, viii. 44. It is this wicked one which is denominated "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Eph. ii. 2.

The conduct of the Lord Jesus Christ and that of the god of this world, towards their respective subjects, are exactly opposite one to another. Jesus Christ tells his disciples in the most open and explicit manner of all the disadvantages and evils which will follow their attachment to him: "Ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death; and ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." Luke, xxi. 16, 17. If he has concealed any thing, it is the exceeding greatness of that portion of infinite blessedness which he has prepared for his saints in another world. The prince of darkness deceives his followers by alluring and fallacious promises of intense and permanent pleasure in sensual gratifications, carefully concealing all the danger and misery of his service. His conduct towards the Son of God, when he shewed "him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," and said, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me,"

“ me,” Matt. iv. 8, 9. is that which he pursues towards his deluded followers; and with them he is too successful.

The amazing difference there is between the principles, views, and pursuits of the two descriptions of persons of whom we have been speaking, accounts for what is said by an inspired writer: “ As then he that was born after the flesh “ persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, “ even so it is now.” Gal. iv. 29. It accounts for that part of sacred history out of which I have selected my text. Here we see the blindness and rage of the children of Satan carried to the highest degree of which they are capable. The Jews and their rulers are against Christ, his truth, and his ministers; they are determined, if possible, to root up what is counted a heresy; and rather than fail, they will murder the founders and supporters of this new religion, under a pretence of their being enemies to the state. Stephen, one of the most gifted and zealous of all the disciples of Christ, is one of the first that attracts their notice; when he stands before their tribunal, he not only disdains to conceal his faith, or to abandon his ministerial office, but he has the courage to reprove them for their ignorance, unbelief, and impiety, in the most direct and pointed terms. Unable to confute his reasoning, and enraged almost to madness at his faithful reproofs and his undaunted courage, “ they cried out with a  
“ loud

“ loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran  
 “ upon him with one accord, and cast him out  
 “ of the city, and stoned him,” ver. 57, 58. The  
 words of my text which form a part of his dying  
 expressions, are so interesting, that I shall detain  
 you a few moments from the more immediate ob-  
 ject of our present attention, to make a few re-  
 flections upon them.

The person speaking in my text was one of the  
 seven Christians chosen for deacons in the church  
 at Jerusalem, and is said to be “ a man full of  
 “ faith and of the Holy Ghost.” Acts, vi. 5. He  
 was not only fired with an ardent and holy zeal  
 for the honour of Jesus Christ, and the spiritual  
 and eternal salvation of precious souls, but the  
 Lord wonderfully blessed his labours; for it is said,  
 “ And Stephen, full of faith and power, did  
 “ great wonders and miracles among the people.”  
 His success, though it tended only to make men  
 more devout worshippers of God, and better  
 members of society, yet it rendered him the more  
 odious to self-righteous pharisees and carnal priests.

It is instructive to notice in what character,  
 and under what circumstances, Stephen utters  
 this sentence. He is condemned to death, and  
 that cruel and unjust sentence is now carrying  
 into execution : one might well ask, in the words  
 of Pilate concerning Christ, “ What evil hath he  
 “ done?” Is he a blasphemer of God, or an  
 enemy to mankind? Just the reverse. But  
 they



they "suborned men," who say as much as this:—Those who persecute men on account of their religion, are generally ashamed of the principle on which they really act, which is enmity against Christ. The chief actors in this diabolical tragedy are "the synagogue of the Libertines, and the elders and the scribes," chap. vi. 9. 12. What a strange coalition! similar, in some respects, to the case mentioned in Luke, xxiii. 11. "And Herod, with his men of war, set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate; and the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves." Let the friends of Jesus learn a lesson from the unity of wicked men in their opposition to him and his cause. Shall they be of one heart in so bad a service, and shall believers fall out by the way? God forbid! Let us lay aside our prejudices and our divisions, and cordially join our councils and our efforts to spread abroad the light of divine truth and the blessings of salvation.

It is pleasing to observe how this good man was occupied in this trying hour. He feels no anxiety to repel the odious charges which had been exhibited against him; he makes no inglorious endeavour to save his life; he had well studied, and was now realizing, the importance of his Master's injunction; "Be not afraid of  
" them



“ them that kill the body, and after that have  
 “ no more that they can do.” Luke, xii. 4, 5.  
 His eyes and his heart are towards heaven ; his  
 character and his life he can leave in the hand of  
 his God ; his soul is engaged in humble and  
 fervent prayer for the safe arrival of his spirit be-  
 fore the throne of God and the Lamb.

This dying faint closely copied the heavenly  
 temper of his Master, who prayed thus for his  
 murderers : “ Father, forgive them, for they  
 “ know not what they do.” Luke, xxiii. 34. Those  
 unruly passions, anger and revenge, which are  
 frequently excited and inflamed by reproach and  
 ill treatment, are in him brought into subjection  
 to the power of divine grace ; and to a prayer  
 for the entrance of his spirit into the bosom of  
 Jesus, he adds one for his merciless and blood-  
 thirsty enemies : “ Lord, lay not this sin to their  
 “ charge,” ver. 60. This is the very genius of  
 the religion of Jesus ; it breathes nothing but  
 kindness and good-will towards men, even to  
 our most inveterate enemies. We have good  
 encouragement to pray for them which persecute  
 us, from the instance of Saul, whose conversion  
 to God soon followed the circumstance of his  
 holding the clothes of the young men who stoned  
 Stephen, and who ultimately became a more suc-  
 cessful minister of the gospel than even the martyr  
 Stephen, to whose death he was consenting.

It

It would be highly improper to pass on without noticing the very important fact, that this prayer was directed to the Lord Jesus Christ, which furnishes us with some very interesting points of doctrine. Here we discern the certainty of Christ's resurrection from the dead. This doctrine forms a key-stone in the building of Truth, if the apostle Paul is to be believed, for he says, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; ye are yet in your sins."

1 Cor. xv. 14. 17.

Here also we learn the pleasing and soul-animating truth, that when the body of the believer dies, his soul ascends to glory, yea, to the immediate presence and enjoyment of Jesus Christ. This is the great principle which has not only reconciled Christians to death, but made them pray for it as a blessing, and given them to understand those words of the apostle, "Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." Phil. i. 23. It was this which calmed and animated the soul of Stephen in the midst of that tremendous storm which hurried his soul into the haven of eternal rest.

From this prayer of the dying martyr we infer the divinity of Jesus Christ. It is, without doubt, an act of religious worship, and contains an implied confession of his supreme glory and power. There are but few texts in the scriptures which the adversaries of the godhead of Christ will find

more difficult to mould into their scheme than this. To deny the fact would be to impeach the validity of the whole history contained in the Acts of the Apostles; to allow it, and question the propriety of it, would be to charge ignorance and the worship of the creature upon one of the wisest and holiest men that ever called upon the name of God in prayer; yea, upon one who is said to be "full of the Holy Ghost." If the truth of the history be not questioned, if the action of the saint be not blamed as improper, then, in my judgment, there is no ground on which the inference we draw from the passage can fairly be either denied or overthrown.

The last description of prayer on which I proposed to discourse was ejaculatory prayer, and of this we have a most beautiful example in the truly devout and ardent expression of Stephen, which we have now read as our text. It is not part of a regular prayer, but it is a sudden and pious ejaculation arising out of the unexpected circumstances under which he was now placed. In discoursing of ejaculatory prayer we shall speak,

I. Of its nature. The word by which it is denominated, like the word Trinity, and many other words which are in familiar use among Christians, is not a scriptural term; but it is derived from a word which signifies to dart, or to shoot



shoot out suddenly, and is therefore appropriate to describe the kind of prayer we now speak of, which is in general made up of short, detached, and unpremeditated sentences, frequently and spontaneously springing from the souls of the righteous; who being daily and hourly subject to the spiritual sensations of hungering and thirsting after the bread and water of life, are continually expressing the desire of their souls to God in ejaculatory petitions, sometimes in their own words, and sometimes in the express words of scripture.

Though this kind of prayer is produced in a more hasty and irregular manner than either of the kinds we have spoken of before, yet as it is the offspring of the renewed mind, so it is not light and trifling, but serious and devout, and is often singularly pithy and vehement. Abounding in this heavenly practice, is one genuine mark of a gracious mind; of a mind sensible of its own weakness and insufficiency, and of its constant dependance upon that God towards whom it constantly aspires. It is also the medium through which those exhortations, "Praying always," and "Pray without ceasing," are most fully and most frequently exemplified. I proceed to shew,

II. That we have many instances and examples of ejaculatory prayer in the word of God. They are of two kinds—those which are mental, in  
 K 2 which



which the heart alone spake to God, and those which are external, the voice accompanying the heart.

Of that inward ejaculatory prayer, by which the soul silently sighs out its wants and miseries to God, we have one instance in the case of Moses, to whom the Lord said, "Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." *Exod. xiv. 15.* It is naturally concluded from hence, that Moses had put up to God some devout and fervent ejaculations in prayer, to which God makes a gracious answer. We have another example of this kind in the history of that good woman Hannah, of whom it is said, "She spake in her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard." *1 Sam. i. 13.* Her troubled spirit darted forth, in strong and vehement ejaculations to God, those petitions which, though often repeated, apparently without any success, were at last abundantly answered, and returned into her bosom the blessing she had so long sought. We have also one more striking elucidation of our subject in the experience of Nehemiah, who was a truly good man, and a very distinguished patriot, consulting the real advantage of his country beyond either his own ease or interest; yea, beyond all the honours and pleasures of one of the most splendid courts then existing: what is said of Moses, may with truth be said of him,

him, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with  
 " the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures  
 " of sin for a season." Heb. xi. 25. If he had  
 been of a selfish and carnal temper, he would  
 have been contented with a few cold expressions  
 of pity and regret when the city, the place of his  
 father's sepulchre, was laid waste, and the gates  
 thereof were consumed with fire: but no; though  
 he has all things richly to enjoy, and feels no per-  
 sonal disadvantage from the calamitous state of  
 his country, his compassionate heart bleeds over  
 its ruins, and his countenance daily betrays its in-  
 ward affliction. When the king noticed this, asked  
 after the reason, and finally desired to know the  
 object of his desire, he tells us, that "he prayed  
 " before the God of heaven." Neh. i. 4. From a  
 due consideration of all the circumstances of this  
 passage, it is most reasonable to conclude, that he  
 prayed in devout and fervent ejaculations.

But we are to shew, that there are instances  
 of ejaculatory prayer in which the voice an-  
 nounces the desire of the soul: these are more  
 numerous than the former, and may be considered  
 under various particulars.

Sometimes the soul expresses itself in those  
 devout and sudden emotions, which we denomi-  
 nate ejaculations, by the medium of *adoration*.  
 There is a remarkable proof of this in the well-  
 known instance of unbelieving Thomas, who had  
 long doubted the truth of his Master's resur-  
 rection,

rection, and, in the most perverse and obstinate manner, resisted a torrent of evidence which poured in upon him from every direction; but when the scales fell from his eyes, when his unbelief was removed, and he saw indeed that his beloved Master was come forth from the grave, he breathed forth the vehement emotions of his heart in this truly interesting ejaculation: "My Lord and my God!" John, xx. 28.

At other times the ejaculatory exercises of the soul are expressed by the medium of *complaint and lamentation*. We discern much of this in that part of scripture, in which an inspired apostle is describing the severe conflicts which arise in the souls of believers through the remains of sin. The truth and the severity of this painful and perpetual conflict in his own experience, wrung from him this abrupt and sententious ejaculation: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Scarce had he uttered this lamentation over the remains of sin in his heart, than there darted forth from his soul, like an arrow from the well-strung bow, this ejaculation of praise: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom. vii. 24, 25.

Again: Holy and devout ejaculations arise to God from the Christian most of all in a way of *petition and supplication*. Thus Joseph, when he met his brother Benjamin, from whom he had long been separated, not only felt the strong emotions



emotions of natural affection, but he felt also the still more energetic operations of grace, and poured forth this pious ejaculation: " God be " gracious to thee, my son!" Gen. xliii. 29. In like manner Sampson (who, though surrounded with many and great infirmities, was a man of faith and prayer), when brought into great trouble through his own indiscretion and departure from God, in the bitterness of his soul offered up to God these fervent ejaculations: " O Lord God! remember me, I pray thee, and " strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, " that I may be avenged of the Philistines for " my two eyes." Judges, xvi. 28. That also was a remarkable ejaculatory petition which burst forth from the distressed and agonizing mind of one of the condemned malefactors who suffered with Jesus Christ. Sensible of his own sinfulness and misery, perceiving the reality of a future state, and fully convinced of the grace and power of Jesus Christ to save the lost, he cried out, " Lord, remember me when thou comest into " thy kingdom." To which the condescending and infinitely compassionate Jesus, without one moment's hesitation, said, " Verily, I say unto " thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Luke, xxiii. 42, 43. But the most interesting and impressive of all the instances we are capable of adducing upon the subject of ejaculatory prayer will be found in the example of Jesus Christ: he not only prayed in public among his disciples and



others, he not only retired to the mountain apart to pray, but he abounded in those holy and devout aspirations which we denominate ejaculatory prayer. We might give many proofs of this remark, but we shall select only one, and that bears a peculiar resemblance to the passage selected for our text. Christ, like Stephen, had his doctrine impugned as blasphemy, and he was himself counted a traitor to the civil powers; and therefore a tumult was excited against him, and he was judged unworthy to live: when the sentence of death is carrying into execution, instead of looking upon his wicked and cruel persecutors with indignation, and pouring out upon them the execrations they so justly deserve, he looks upon them with pity, and breathes forth the tenderness and compassion of his soul in this ejaculation: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." Luke, xxiii. 34.

Another way in which the souls of good men have been drawn out in ejaculation, has been by expressions of holy submission to God when sorely afflicted by the visitations of his hand; and by ardent appeals to God when oppressed and persecuted by the children of men. We have a most affecting example of the former in the case of Job, who is at once the most singular instance of suffering and of patience recorded in the sacred scriptures. After a long series of misfortunes had befallen him in the loss of his property, either  
by

by hands of robbers or fire from heaven; and the loss of all his children by one affecting providence; under this accumulated weight of distress, he is enabled to say, in the language of true submission, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Job, i. 21. Of the latter we have an example in David, who was hated and persecuted by Saul in the most cruel and unjust manner: when the Lord had put the person of his persecutor into his hand, he spared his life, and after reproving him for his injustice and wickedness, he makes the following reasonable and energetic appeal to God: "The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee, but my hand shall not be upon thee." 1 Sam. xxiv. 12.

The last species of ejaculation which I shall mention is that of *thanksgiving and praise*; of which we have one instance in the case of Abraham's servant, when he went to find a wife for Isaac. This good man had conscientiously sought the blessing of God upon his undertaking, and obtained it to the full extent of his wishes; full of joy and gratitude on account thereof, he thankfully exclaims, "Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth; I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of  
" my

“ my master’s brethren.” Gen. xxiv. 27. We have another specimen of this kind of ejaculation in the case of David, whose resentment against Nabal for his unkind treatment was excited to such a degree, that he hastily determined to destroy him and all his family; but his rashness was moderated, and his vindictive resolution laid aside, through the mild and prudent conduct of Abigail, for which he lifted up his heart to God in the following words: “ Blessed be the Lord  
 “ God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet  
 “ me.” 1 Sam. xxv. 32. I shall produce but one instance more, which is that of our blessed Master, who, in a sudden but devout manner, lifted up his eyes towards heaven, and gave praise to the Father for the gracious and sovereign manner in which he revealed the blessings of redemption to perishing sinners in the following ejaculatory sentences: “ I thank thee, O Father, Lord of  
 “ heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these  
 “ things from the wise and the prudent, and  
 “ hast revealed them unto babes. Even so,  
 “ Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight.” Matt. xi. 25, 26.

III. I proceed to shew the times and seasons when we should exercise ourselves in ejaculatory prayer. It is one of the principal excellencies of this kind of prayer, that it can be practised at all times, in all places, and in all the daily occupations of life; but we shall notice some particular seasons.

It



It is proper to mingle this kind of prayer with all the public ordinances of religion. All the success of preaching depends upon the assistance and blessing of God, and therefore both preachers and hearers should often send up ejaculations to God. The prophets frequently broke off in the middle of a set discourse, or sermon, to ask God's presence and blessing. Thus Isaiah, when he was denouncing a great woe upon the enemies of the church, suddenly exclaims, "O Lord! be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee." Isa. xxxiii. 2. Another prophet, in the midst of a most humbling and affecting description of the debased and desolate state of Zion, earnestly lifts up his soul to God in this ejaculation: "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood in the midst of Carmel; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old." Micah, vii. 14. In like manner Jesus Christ, when preaching concerning his own sufferings, and their depressing influence upon his soul, prays, "Father, glorify thy name." John, xii. 28. Serious and attentive hearers also have much opportunity for this kind of prayer, whilst going to and when seated in their places of worship; I say, serious and attentive hearers, because prayer is not to be expected from the thoughtless and indevout, whose eyes are roving all over the congregation, and their hearts to the very ends of the  
the



the earth; and consequently they can have no real concern for the objects of public worship to be accomplished in their experience. But the real Christian wants the light of gospel truth reflected upon his understanding, the power of it to be felt upon his conscience, and the purity of it transcribed into his life and conversation; every sermon, therefore, which he hears, he accompanies with holy and fervent ejaculations to God, that it may be followed with his grace and blessing. At the Lord's table the Christian should abound in ejaculatory prayer. There are, in the scriptural mode of administering the Lord's supper, intervals, which may well be occupied in praying to the Lord Jesus to break the true bread of life to our souls, and to apply the blood of the covenant, in its healing and cleansing power, to our consciences.

We may accompany all our lawful undertakings, both common and extraordinary, with short and serious petitions to God. Thus Jacob, when he was sending his sons down into Egypt to buy corn (particularly on account of Benjamin going with them), uttered this ejaculation: "God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother and Benjamin." Gen. xliii. 14. When David was told that his son Absalom had conspired against him, and that Ahitophel was with him, he instantly cried out, "O Lord! I pray thee turn the  
" counsel

" counsel of Ahitophel into foolishness." 2 Sam. xv. 31. And it was the gracious answer which God gave to this ejaculatory petition, which finally made the measures of David to prosper, to his own safety and the happiness of his people.

Times of affliction, temptation, and danger, are also suitable seasons for this kind of prayer. The first of these is exemplified in blind Bartimeus, who no sooner heard of Jesus passing by, and conceiving he had power to heal, than in haste, and without the least premeditation, he cried out, " Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy " on me." Mark, x. 47. We find an example of the second in the case of the apostle Paul, who, when he had a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him. 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8. In like manner should all Christians, when suddenly and powerfully attacked by the temptations of the devil, instantly cry out to God upon the very spot where it is made. The concluding branch of this remark is strongly expressed in the conduct of the disciples, who, when in a storm, ran to Jesus Christ and awoke him, at the same time praying thus importunately, " Lord, save us, " we perish !" Matt. viii. 25.: and also in the case of Peter singly, who, when in his own view in danger of sinking, cried, " Lord, save me !" Matt. xiv. 30.

Good

Good men have accustomed themselves to ejaculatory prayer at meeting and parting with each other, and also in their correspondence by letter. The former of these is seen in the instance of Boaz and his reapers: when Boaz came into the harvest-field, he said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you; and they answered him, The Lord blefs thee." Ruth, ii. 4. Instances of the latter very frequently occur in Paul's writings to his son Timothy, for whom he felt an unusual degree of Christian affection; and hence, whilst he is instructing him in various branches of that duty which attached to him as a minister of Christ, he mingles his exhortations with such devout ejaculations as these: "The Lord give thee understanding in all things." 2 Tim. ii. 7. "The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit; grace be with you, Amen." 2 Tim. iv. 22. In this same epistle, speaking of a good man who had greatly assisted and comforted him whilst he was a prisoner at Rome, he blends with descriptions of his kindness, pious ejaculations for his prosperity, saying, "The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain. But when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day," chap. i. 16—18.

We



We are not precluded from this species of prayer, even when passing and repassing through the most populous streets of this metropolis: our eyes will at one time behold objects, and our ears at another will hear sounds, which will demand ejaculations both of prayer and praise: if we see indigent and diseased persons, this calls upon us for expressions of gratitude to Divine Providence; and if we see profane and vicious characters, this should lead us to admire the distinguishing and sovereign grace of God, who has made us to differ; though we were liable to, and capable of falling into, the same abyss of sin and misery: yea, the scenes of vice and immorality exhibited in our streets, are such as will often constrain real Christians, especially parents, silently to wrestle with God in the public streets, that their own children and the rising generation at large may be preserved from the foul contagion of vice, which is making awful inroads upon the principles and morals of our youth of both sexes.

Ejaculatory prayer may also be practised by the serious and contemplative mind, even amidst the hurry and bustle of worldly occupations. The godly mechanic will sometimes find that his soul is aspiring to God in prayer, whilst his eyes and his hands are busily employed in his calling: the conscientious tradesman, whilst behind his counter, and teased by the impertinent inquiries of idle loungers, who have no intention of buying,

or



or the grinding disposition of the real purchaser, who says of his commodity, "It is naught, it is naught," Prov. xx. 14; he will also find leisure for prayer by ejaculation. Even the merchant, the ample range of whose commercial connexions and engagements continually fills his mind with anxious care and solicitude, and whose attention is incessantly called, both in the counting-house and upon the Exchange, to matters in which his honour, his credit, and his interest, are intimately concerned, if he have a spirit of prayer, will sometimes send forth a devout and fervent ejaculation.

Our seasons of social intercourse will furnish us with abundant matter for ejaculatory prayer. The Christian, who, of all men, should be most scrupulous in the choice of his company, is sometimes unexpectedly cast into that which is very complex; composed, it may be, of the openly profane, the self-righteous, the formal professor, and the true believer: this variety of characters furnishes occasion for ejaculations both of prayer and praise. The conversation of social parties, the topics of which are abundant and various, will furnish materials for this kind of prayer. The subjects of social conversation are not only sometimes unusually trifling and frivolous, but they are at others highly disgusting and criminal, being either vain and licentious, or consisting of unkind and slanderous reflections upon the character and conduct of others

others behind their backs, whilst to their faces the slanderer will shew every expression of esteem and good-will. If we cannot repress such conversation, we should at least be occupied in pitying and praying for those who are the chief promoters of it; yea, we may very properly lift up our hearts to God in prayer, that he would alike keep us from either being partakers of their error in the backbiting of others, or falling under the venom of their tongues ourselves. But if social conversation be of the serious and instructive kind, the scope for the exercise of ejaculatory prayer is still more extensive. If we hear of friends and neighbours who are sick and dying, let us pray for them; and, knowing our own frailty and mortality, let us pray that we may stand fully prepared for the summons ourselves, by having on the wedding garment, and by being enabled to "put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." Eph. iv. 24. If we hear of the declensions and falls of other professors, *let us also fear*, and lift up our hearts to God in the language of David, "O keep my soul, and deliver me!" Psal. xxv. 20. If we hear of the conversion of a fellow-sinner, let us imitate the angels, among whom there is joy "over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance," Luke, xv. 7.; and let us wrestle with God for the coming of

that day when all shall know Him, from the least to the greatest.

Lastly: In times of sickness and pain, or when the hour of dissolution is approaching, we should exercise ourselves much in the use of ejaculatory prayer. Under these circumstances, Christians are shut out from all the public ordinances which they were accustomed to attend with so much delight and profit, and are incapacitated, by the nature of their affliction, to engage in any other kind of prayer. They find occasional ejaculations a suitable and pleasing medium of continuing their intercourse with God at a throne of grace, even to the last moment. We might not only take Christ and Stephen as patterns of this kind of prayer, in the hour of their departure out of time, but we might give a long list of beautiful and instructive examples from the lives of the martyrs, most of whom, like Stephen, when suffering the most cruel and unjust treatment from men, have, in the most earnest and devout manner, poured out their souls to God in ejaculatory prayer, both for themselves and for their murderers.

IV. The encouragement there is to this kind of prayer, and the blessings which result from it. It is a species of devotion that can receive no impediment from the consideration of time or place. When the woman of Samaria said to Christ, "Our fathers worshipped in this moun-

“tain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the  
 “place where men ought to worship,” John, iv.  
 20.; he took occasion, from what she said, to  
 observe, that the time was at hand, when sanc-  
 tity attaching to particular places should be done  
 away, and that the only important thing to be  
 regarded in prayer would be that of its being  
 offered in spirit and in truth. It is now all holy  
 ground, either where two or three meet together  
 to supplicate the throne of grace, or where there  
 is only one believer whose soul ascends to God in  
 holy ejaculations.

We have great encouragment to engage in this  
 description of prayer, from the kind attention God  
 has given to them who have practised it. When the  
 children of Reuben, and the Gadites, and half-  
 tribe of Manasseh, had war with the Hagarites,  
 it is said, “They were helped against them, and  
 “the Hagarites were delivered into their hands,  
 “and all that were with them; for they cried to  
 “God in the battle, and he was entreated of  
 “them, because they put their trust in him.”  
 1 Chron. v. 20. The prayer which was thus pre-  
 valent with God could be no other than ejacu-  
 latory, since it was offered up to God in the very  
 heat of the conflict.

The malefactor who suffered on the cross  
 with Jesus Christ no sooner said, “Lord, remem-  
 “ber me when thou comest into thy kingdom,”  
 than the Saviour answered immediately, without



hesitation or delay, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Luke, xxiii. 42, 43. To be successful with God in obtaining spiritual blessings, it requires neither loud nor long prayers; He looks at the heart, and is as attentive to the pious ejaculation as to the more regular and stated devotions of the good man.

One blessing attendant upon the habitual and serious exercise of ejaculatory prayer is, that it helps to keep the heart from the inroads of vain, worldly, and wicked thoughts. The heart of man is never totally unoccupied; if it be not occupied with God and good things, it will soon be under the influence of the prince of darkness. This strong man armed, who has been cast out, and had his goods spoiled, will be watching for an opportunity of returning, at least, to disturb and annoy; for it is impossible that he should ever remove the saved sinner from under the dominion of Jesus Christ again. Nothing more effectually tends to secure the avenues of the renewed mind against his predatory excursions, than a strong and habitual disposition to ejaculatory prayer: this is one way in which the Christian carries into practice the following apostolic injunction: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." James, iv. 7.

Another advantage which follows ejaculatory prayer is, that it gives the mind a more ready and permanent bias towards other spiritual and  
stated

stated services, whether performed in the closet, the family, or the church. If our thoughts and desires be all through the day intent only upon worldly things, and never once turned towards God and heavenly objects, it is almost certain, that when we come to more public and stated devotions we shall find our hearts, if not confused, and unable to “attend upon the Lord without “distraction,” 1 Cor. vii. 35. at least cold and sluggish: but, abounding in ejaculatory prayer, the mind is kept alive and active in its holy vocation, moves on in its own proper sphere, and returns to public ordinances with that disposition towards them which enables it to enjoy their true sweetness while engaged in them, and constrains it on its return from them to say, “It is “good for me to draw near to God.” Psa. lxxiii. 28.

Again: The constant practice of ejaculatory prayer tends to make us resemble Enoch, of whom it is said, that “he walked with God.” Gen. v. 22. It tends to make our affections spiritual, and to attract them towards the heavenly world, and so to produce a compliance with the apostle’s advice, “Set your affections “on things above, and not on things on the “earth,” Col. iii. 2.; it brings us, in a measure, to have our conversation in heaven, from whence we look for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In attempting some improvement of this subject we address ourselves,

1. To worldly and carnal men. If you ever utter any thing in a way of prayer, it is by ejaculation; but even this favours more of profaneness than of devotion, in the manner you practise it. Sometimes, after being intensely heated with passion, and breaking forth in a torrent of profane swearing, 'conscience dictates a cold and formal ejaculation, "God forgive me!" At other times the slightest matter of surprise leads you to exclaim, "Lord, have mercy upon me!" or, "Christ, have mercy upon me!" These ejaculations have not in them the nature of true prayer: they are direct and express violations of the third commandment, which says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." *Exod. xx. 7.* That neglect which many shew towards every other kind of prayer, is apologized for under an idea that God looks at the heart, and that one petition is as good as a thousand. I have either read or heard an anecdote of a man who was accustomed to say, that he should think himself safe if, when he came to die, he only had time to say, "Lord, have mercy upon me!" It so happened, that death suddenly arrested him in an unexpected moment; his desire of having time to utter one prayer was granted; but instead of praying for the salvation of his soul, he spent that one moment's respite from eternity in praying for its damnation.

damnation. Oh, thou wicked and deceitful heart of man! to what a dark, deluded, and dreadful state has sin reduced thee!

2. To mere professors of religion, who totally neglect this kind of prayer, we address the language of reproof. You think it is enough to say your prayers statedly; and having done this, you think no more either of God or religion till the regular season of devotion comes round again. It should be told you, that one leading trait of difference between the formal professor and the real Christian lies in this—to the former all religious duties are a task, to the latter they are pleasing and delightful. Religion is the good man's calling, and his heart is incessantly occupied with it, even though his hands are employed in his worldly business.

There are, however, some professors who are worthy of reproof on a different ground. They slight all stated seasons of prayer, and satisfy themselves in the habitual neglect thereof, under an idea that it is too late, or that it is enough to offer up a few ejaculatory petitions after their heads are laid down upon their pillow: these must be sluggish prayers indeed; favouring strongly of the natural man; and neither pleasing to God, nor profitable to his creatures. This is indeed offering the lame, and the halt, and the blind, for sacrifice.



3. To the real Christian we offer exhortation and advice. We have shewn you the nature and importance of ejaculatory prayer, and we recommend to you a serious and constant attention to it ; but to practise it with success, you must cultivate a familiar acquaintance with the following subjects.

The evil of sin, and a tenderness of conscience in regard to it, is among the first of those things that should be strongly felt and carefully cherished by a Christian. Temptations to sin arise from many quarters, and assail us under many specious appearances ; and only to parley with them is productive of so many baneful effects, that we should ever be watching and praying against them. The more we see this, and feel our danger and weakness, the more frequently shall we be lifting up our souls to God in such petitions as these : “ Cleanse thou me from secret faults ;  
“ keep back thy servant also from presumptuous  
“ sins, let them not have dominion over me.”  
Psa. xix. 12, 13.

Another subject which has a strong tendency to draw the heart out in ejaculatory prayer, is a sense of the love of God to us in Jesus Christ : this has an attractive influence upon the soul, drawing it away from earth and sin, and assimilating it to the mind and spirit of Him whose essence is love.

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We shall also abound in ejaculatory prayer, in proportion as we discern our interest in Jesus and his salvation. If Jesus be our master and our friend, we shall be anxious to converse with him, and receive from him some tokens of his kindness and care; of course our souls will often be darting forth their wishes towards him; he must be ever the first and chief object of our spiritual regard; and of his presence the believer will cheerfully say,

“ ’Tis thy sweet beams create my noon;  
 “ If thou withdraw, ’t is night.”

Another subject calculated to enlarge the soul in ejaculatory prayer, is the doctrine of Divine Providence. I speak not merely of that providence which extends universally to all the material and intelligent part of creation; but I refer to that special providence which has to do with the Christian in particular, and which extends to all his personal, relative, and spiritual concerns;—that providence which suffers not one hair of the Christian’s head to fall to the ground, without its notice. This is such an encouraging and consolatory doctrine to the believer, that it cannot fail to allay his fears, encourage his hopes, and lead him to much prayer to God, that his wise and gracious influence would guide, protect, and bless him at all times and seasons, and in every work of his hands.

Again:

Again : We shall be much engaged in lifting up our souls to the Lord in this kind of prayer, if we attain to much spiritual-mindedness. The heart must be in a measure freed from its carnal and grovelling propensities. Jesus Christ taught his disciples a very important lesson, and one that is abundantly exemplified in the experience of Christians : “ Where your treasure is, there “ will your heart be also.” Matt. vi. 21. “ The “ unsearchable riches of Christ,” Eph. iii. 8. is the believer’s portion and inheritance ; He is “ the pearl of great price,” to obtain which the renewed mind would part with a thousand worlds. If, therefore, our souls are properly affected with divine things, there will be found in them a strong bias to heavenly objects, and a holy and ardent aspiring after them in ejaculatory prayer.

This desirable frame of mind will also be much increased and strengthened by a deep sense of our frailty and mortality. If we live under the impression that we are dying creatures, that we stand in jeopardy every hour, and that peradventure we may be called into eternity without any previous intimation by pain or sickness ; this will shew us the necessity of what our Lord so strongly recommends to his disciples, and which he urges with so powerful a motive in the following passage : “ Therefore be ye also ready, “ for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of “ Man cometh.” Matt. xxiv. 44. A full persuasion

suasion that we are strangers and sojourners here, and that peradventure we shall be at home in a day or two, will surely tend to weaken our concern and anxiety about our accommodations upon the road. This is one of the evils from which we especially need to be delivered. Though the things which are temporal are only temporary conveniences granted for our use in our journey through the wilderness, yet how eagerly we grasp them, and what an inordinate anxiety we feel about them !

“ The fondness of a creature’s love,  
 “ How strong it strikes the sense !  
 “ Thither the warm affections move,  
 “ Nor can we call them thence.

“ Dear Saviour, let thy beauties be  
 “ My soul’s eternal food ;  
 “ And grace command my heart away  
 “ From all created good.”

Finally : To be habitually practising ejaculatory prayer requires an abundant supply of grace, and the continual influence of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of grace and supplication. The whole bias of our affections naturally is to the things which are temporal ; they never rise to the things which are eternal but by the constraining and powerful agency of the Holy Spirit ; and if that be withdrawn, they instantly sink to their native element again : “ The first man is of  
 “ the



" the earth, earthy." 1 Cor. xv. 47. How earnest, then, should we be for the presence and assistance of this divine agent to help our infirmities, and keep our hearts on the wing towards God and heaven! how solicitous should we be to keep in remembrance, and to carry into practice, that solemn and needful injunction of the apostle: " Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Eph. iv. 30. We but too often fall into the error against which we are here admonished, and we instantly experience the baneful effects of it. Let this then put us out of love with our present weak and imperfect state; let it urge us to look forward, and aspire after, that glorious, that infinitely blessed day, when our " eyes shall see the king in his beauty, and behold the land that is very far off." Isa. xxxiii. 17. Then our souls shall never more be seduced from their delight in God and eternal things; prayer shall then be changed into praise, hope into fruition, and our souls be ever near, and always like Him, after whom they have so often sighed in holy ejaculations. " Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy: to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. *Amen,*"

## SERMON IX.

THE PREVALENCE OF CHRIST'S INTER-  
CESSION FOR HIS PRAYING PEOPLE.



1 JOHN, ii. 1.

*We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ  
the righteous.*

WHEN it is considered, that the gospel is a revelation from God, it is natural to conclude, that it must be a wise, a gracious, and a suitable provision of mercy for helpless and guilty man; and that it is highly suited to accomplish all those beneficial effects which God had designed to accomplish through its instrumentality. Among these may be reckoned principally, the enlightening of the mind with the knowledge of the one living and true God, the effectual conversion of the soul, and producing a holy conformity to God in the life and conversation.

tion. It is only in the gospel revelation that men have a full and faithful manifestation of the nature, perfections, and character of God, together with an exact detail of that knowledge, experience, and practice, which constitute the leading features of the Christian character, which are highly pleasing to God, and the immediate fruit of his own omnipotence and grace.

If I were asked, in what branch of revelation the Christian might find one of the most concise and comprehensive views of genuine Christianity? I would say, in the admirable and truly instructive epistolary writings of the apostle John. Here the doctrine of the glorious Trinity, the union of the divine and human nature in the person of Jesus Christ, the personality, divinity, and influences of the Holy Ghost, are beautifully and strongly insisted upon. They set forth also the rich and powerful operation of the truth upon the heart, as it draws it to a near and constant intercourse with God at a throne of grace, an ardent love to him, and a kind and affectionate regard to all that belong to his family and bear his image. They furnish, moreover, a full and explicit body of evidence on which every professor is to determine his own state and character. They shew the impracticability of the love of God and the love of the world being united in the same person; the folly of concluding that we are the children of God and of light, if we obey not his

his commandments, or live in the indulgence and practice of any known or allowed sin.

The person whose name is affixed to this epistle was the beloved disciple of Jesus Christ, and was privileged to lean upon his Master's bosom ; and well did he improve this indulgence by catching much of his Master's spirit, and treasuring up with careful assiduity the heavenly things which fell from the Redeemer's lips. Others of the evangelists are more particular in the relation they give of the birth, temptations, and sufferings of Jesus ; but this disciple, in the gospel which bears his signature, has preserved many of his discourses, especially those which he delivered just before the awful period of his giving his life a ransom for sinners. These throw much light upon the ministry of Jesus Christ, and have been instrumental of much comfort to the saints. They also describe the nature and tendency of his work, speaking in the most explicit manner of his death as the price of his people's ransom, and the absolute necessity of his departure from his disciples, that he might fulfil the prophecies which related to the coming of the Holy Ghost ; who, when he came, was to convince men of sin, lead them into the truth, take the things of Jesus, and shew them unto their souls, and thus become " the Comforter."

Of all the subjects on which this pleasing and instructive writer has employed his pen, there is  
 none



none which is more important in itself, or upon which he has more fully unveiled the mind of God, than upon that of Christ having gone into heaven, to abide there as the intercessor and advocate of his church and people. This is the delightful and soul-reviving truth of which he is speaking in the words of my text, and which he places before the eyes of the disciples of Jesus Christ, as a doctrine full of encouragement and comfort.

It is taken for granted by this apostle, that the people of God are not utterly freed from the indwelling and strivings of sin against grace; nay, it is supposed, that through the power of temptation, and the excessive weakness of human nature, they may fall into it; this will of course not only offend God and dishonour their profession, but it will necessarily be productive of holy shame and godly sorrow. In such distressing circumstances where shall they find relief? what shall encourage them to approach a throne of grace, confessing and lamenting over their backslidings, and adopting the strong language of the penitent, who said, "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." Psal. li. 8, 9. Under such a frame of mind the apostle proposes the doctrine of Christ's advocacy in the presence of the Father as peculiarly suitable to alleviate and encourage the desponding soul.

The

The doctrine of Jesus Christ being an advocate with the Father, I presumed was the most pleasing and suitable topic with which to conclude these discourses on prayer, because, in whatever kind of prayer we engage, whether public, social, family, private, or ejaculatory, it is from hence that it derives its ultimate success. If Jesus, as the high-priest of our profession, had not entered into the heavens for us with his own blood, our prayers had never found acceptance in the sight of God, we had not persevered in the practice of the duty, nor felt freedom and boldness in the exercise of it. But if he do that for us which he did for Peter, if he pray that our faith fail not, Luke, xxii. 32. instead of being like too many professors, who have run well for a time and then been hindered, or who have totally turned aside from the ways of God, and made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience; instead of resembling these, we shall be enabled to continue a life of holy fellowship with God: and this consolatory truth, that *we have an Advocate with the Father*, will encourage us to come daily, and with holy confidence, to a throne of grace. In this discourse we shall notice,

I. The nature of the office described in this text. It is that of a person who stands up in any court to plead the cause of another, and which may be exercised in different respects:

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1. An advocate is one who sometimes stands up in court to defend and vindicate the innocent from false and wicked accusations, whether preferred against them through ignorance or malevolence. Considering ourselves in a natural and moral point of view, no plea can be offered upon our account; but considered as "accepted in the Beloved," we may, we must be vindicated. Satan is styled "the accuser of the brethren." Rev. xii. 10. A prophet of old had shewed unto him "Joshua the high-priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him." Zech. iii. 1. Men rise up also to accuse Christians, together with their own consciences; but it is their unspeakable mercy that God himself hath said, "Every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn," Isa. liv. 17.; and, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan!" Zech. iii. 2. shall proceed from the mouth of one who has power to cast this adversary down, yea, who has already foiled him in combat, and will not suffer him to succeed against the weakest believer. To this part of Christian doctrine there is an allusion in the following interesting scripture, which contains an exultation of the most pleasing and consolatory description: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather  
" that

“ that is risen again, who is even at the right  
 “ hand of God, who also maketh intercession  
 “ for us.” Rom. viii. 33, 34.

2. An advocate is one who sometimes stands up in a court of judicature to make clear a man's title to, and finally obtain for him the possession of, an inheritance, to which he is the lawful heir. The kingdom of glory is the free and gracious bestowment of the Father to his children: Jesus Christ assured his infant church of this truth when he said, “ Fear not, little flock, for  
 “ it is your Father's good pleasure to give you  
 “ the kingdom.” Luke, xii. 32. He afterwards told them that he would see to their having possession of it: this was a part of his farewell address to them, and was mentioned at that time, because calculated to alleviate the sorrow they felt at parting with him: “ In my Father's house  
 “ are many mansions; if it were not so, I would  
 “ have told you. I go to prepare a place for  
 “ you,” John, xiv. 2. He did not promise, in this instance, more than he meant to perform; they heard him direct his particular attention to this object in prayer to his Father in these words: “ Father, I will that they also whom thou hast  
 “ given me be with me where I am, that they  
 “ may behold my glory.” John, xvii. 24. And such is his confidence of success, that he uses this strong language to his disciples, speaking of his sheep, “ I give unto them eternal life, and



“ they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.” John, x. 28. From all these considerations good men have lived happily and died triumphantly, in the assurance of obtaining this inheritance. We have a striking example of this in the language of the apostle: “ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

3. An advocate is one who appears in court to plead the cause of the guilty. This is the particular point to which the words of the text refer: “ If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father.” It is here allowed by the apostle John, that God’s dear people may fall into sin. If we seriously remember this truth; and call to our mind that it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against God, so far from thinking little of it, or trifling with it, we shall pray for grace to avoid the very appearance of it; we shall watch against it with the greatest vigilance and circumspection. You see then, Christian, there is nothing in the gospel dispensation to encourage sin—there is every thing to discountenance it; and if you ever fall into it, you will surely be brought to repent of and mourn over it; yea, like Peter,

you will be made to weep bitterly. If this be the distressing case of any soul, let me caution that soul against indulging despair; Jesus is *able to save to the uttermost*; and wherefore? because *he ever liveth to make intercession, yea even for the transgressors*. This is the doctrine of our text on which we are now to discourse more particularly. May we discern the beauty of this part of religion, and be enabled so to act faith upon it in every time of need, that we may feel all the peace and comfort it is capable of affording! I proceed to speak,

II. Of the Person who sustains this office for the Christian church—*Jesus Christ the righteous*. He is the only one; saints and angels are made such by the Papal church, but it is a mere fiction, a part of will-worship, having not the least foundation in the word of God: the saints and angels would blush at the idea of attempting it. Indeed it is not only utterly useless, but it is an indignity offered to Jesus Christ, who, in the economy of man's redemption, is alone appointed "an advocate with the Father."

1. The person is *Jesus Christ*, the only and well-beloved Son of God. This was declared by a voice from heaven in the following words: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matt. iii. 17. Standing in this high relation to God, and being thus acceptable in his sight, must necessarily give him a peculiar interest with him.

This Advocate stands also in a near relation to us; he is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; he is our master, our friend, and our brother; he will, therefore, never forget or slight our cause; he loves us, as he ever has done, and takes a great interest in all that concerns our present and eternal blessedness.

He is, moreover, abundantly qualified for this office, in that he is thus described: "Seeing  
 " then we have a great High-priest, that is passed  
 " into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let  
 " us hold fast our profession. For we have not  
 " an high-priest which cannot be touched with  
 " the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all  
 " points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.  
 " Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne  
 " of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find  
 " grace to help us in every time of need." Heb.  
 iv. 14, 15, 16. We see by this passage, how strongly the appearance of Christ in heaven bears upon the subject of our approach to God at a throne of grace, since the apostle takes from thence an argument to come with boldness.

2. The advocate of the church is Jesus Christ *the righteous*. Under this description we may notice the *purity* of Christ. He is not a sinful creature like ourselves; perfect innocence marked every thought, every word, and every action of his. This great truth was typified and prefigured under the Mosaic dispensation: it being ordained,  
 that



that every high-priest should be perfectly free from bodily imperfection, and have "Holiness to the Lord" written upon his forehead, might not be without its allusion to the perfection and holiness of our great High-priest. That every lamb destined for sacrifice was to be *without blemish*, had respect to Jesus, of whom the apostle thus speaks: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

What he is called by an angel, in his address to Mary, is also expressive of this blessed truth; "that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Luke, i. 35. Stephen also denominates him "the Just One." Acts, vii. 52. These expressions are not suitable to any mere creature: no creature is good, no, not one.

All those who have had the best means of being acquainted with the true character of Christ, have uniformly considered him as without sin: it is implied in the conduct of John the Baptist towards Christ, when he came from Galilee to be baptized of him: it is said, "John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" Matt. iii. 14. It



may also be inferred from the language of Peter, when he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Luke, v. 8. Surely he could not consider Christ as like him in that respect, or he would never have expressed himself in such a manner.

The testimony which Christ gave of himself indicates that he was perfectly righteous: "The prince of this world cometh," said the Redeemer, "and hath nothing in me." John, xiv. 30. And again: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" John, viii. 46. The truth of his own testimony was in part corroborated by the confession even of his enemies: Pilate, when he gave him up to be crucified, "took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person, see ye to it." Matt. xxvii. 24. Judas, after the Messiah was condemned, repented, carried back the thirty pieces of silver, and said, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." Matt. xxvii. 4.

The apostle Paul is not content with merely affirming the truth of this doctrine, but he indicates the necessity of his being perfectly righteous: "For such an high-priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high-priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then

“ then for the people’s; for this he did once  
 “ when he offered up himself. For the law  
 “ maketh men high-priests which have infirmity;  
 “ but the word of the oath, which was since the  
 “ law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for  
 “ evermore.” Heb. vii. 26, 27, 28. He makes  
 the glory and pre-eminence of all the work of  
 Christ arise from hence, that he was not, like the  
 high-priest of old, obliged to offer sacrifice for  
 his own sin, inasmuch as he was perfectly holy.

He is highly qualified for this work, not only as  
 he is perfectly holy, but also as he is *faithful* and  
*true* to the work in which he is engaged. The  
 importance and necessity of this trait in the cha-  
 racter of Jesus Christ is beautifully and strongly  
 represented by the apostle in the following scrip-  
 tures: “ Wherefore in all things it behoved him  
 “ to be made like unto his brethren, that he  
 “ might be a merciful and faithful high-priest in  
 “ things pertaining to God, to make reconcilia-  
 “ tion for the sins of the people.” Heb. ii. 17.  
 From this passage it is to be inferred, that faith-  
 fulness is not only a fit and suitable, but a neces-  
 sary branch of the character of our great High-  
 priest. Speaking of him in another place, the  
 apostle makes a comparison between him and the  
 Jewish lawgiver: “ Who was faithful to Him that  
 “ appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in  
 “ all his house.” Heb. iii. 2.

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The fidelity of Jesus Christ, taken in general, is connected with all his work as a Mediator, and may be referred both to his Father and to his church. He had a great work given him to do; he came in the capacity of his Father's servant, according to Isaiah, xlii. 1. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth. I have put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the gentiles." In the discharge of this service he had two great objects to accomplish;—the one was to magnify the law, and make it honourable; and the other to glorify all the divine perfections. His eye and his heart were always directed to these two great ends; he made doing the will of God his meat and his drink; he was a faithful servant, leaving nothing undone which he had engaged to perform; and therefore both the law and justice of God were readily consenting to his release from under the power of death and the grave, he having satisfied all their demands.

But Christ is also faithful to his people as their advocate with the Father. He acted as their Head and Surety whilst he was in a state of humiliation and suffering upon earth; there was nothing that his love and pity induced him to undertake, but he has punctually performed it; and now he is gone into the heavens for us, he is earnestly intent upon finishing the great work he has so graciously



ciously begun : he is too righteous either to forget or neglect our interest : he is engaged by his relation to us, as well as by his office and promise, to procure for us the bestowment of all needful good, and the free and continued acceptance of our persons and services at a throne of grace. Come then, ye weak and fearful saints, *the cause that is too hard for you*, Deut. i. 17. put it into the hand of this wise, this gracious, this righteous and faithful Advocate : he will not refuse your case, he will plead it well, he will plead it successfully. I come now to speak,

III. More particularly of the work of Christ as the Advocate of his people. This grand scripture doctrine is presented to our view both in the Old and New Testament : in the former it was expressly prefigured by the entrance of the high-priest alone into the holy of holies once every year. The leading feature of this part of the Levitical law is conveyed in the following manner : " And Aaron shall bear the names of " the children of Israel in the breastplate of " judgment, upon his heart, when he goeth in " unto the holy place, for a memorial before the " Lord continually." Exod. xxviii. 29. The connexion between this Jewish rite and the advocacy of Christ for his saints is expressly pointed out in the following passages : " But Christ being " come an high-priest of good things to come, by " a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made " with



“ with hands, that is to say, not of this building. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” And again: “ For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” Heb. ix. 12, 13. 24, 25.

This doctrine was also the subject of prophecy. It is not at all improbable that the entrance of Jesus Christ into heaven for his church, after his resurrection, is celebrated in the following truly sublime passage: “ Lift up your heads, O ye gates! and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors! and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.” Psa. xxiv. 7, 8. It is also evidently alluded to in Psa. lxviii. 18. “ Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive.” And again: “ He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore his arm brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness it sustained him.” Isa. lix. 16.

Christ's going into the heavens to fulfil the duties of this office, was often either alluded to or expressly spoken of by the dear Redeemer himself. Sometimes he spake of it in very general terms, as when he said, “ I leave the world, and  
“ go

"go to the Father." John, xvi. 28. At other times he spake of it as having an immediate relation to his disciples, as in the following words: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." John, xvi. 7. And taking his last prayer as a just specimen of the nature and extent of his intercession, it must have respect to the whole church: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." John, xvii. 20. Paul, Peter, and John, and all the rest of the New Testament writers, make mention of this doctrine, and represent it as a doctrine full of instruction, and calculated to afford the Christian the richest consolation, especially in regard to his communion with God at the throne of grace.

Having noticed that Christ is gone into the heavens, to appear in the presence of God for his people, and discharge the office of an advocate on their behalf, let us, in our meditations, follow him thither. It is worthy of our observation, that he performs this office in our nature: that nature in which he suffered and died is, indeed, highly exalted in the Redeemer's ascension to the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Among the children of men, in certain cases, to be placed at the right hand, is a mark of high

high honour. Thus we read, that when Bathsheba went in to speak to her son Solomon, “ the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king’s mother, and she sat on his right hand.” 1 Kings, ii. 19. When, therefore, the scripture represents our Advocate as at the right hand of God, it uses a strong figure to express the dignity and glory of our Divine Master. Jesus Christ himself adopted this mode of speaking, when he would give the Jewish high-priest a strong expression of his supreme glory and power, when he asked him, “ Art thou the Christ, the son of the Blessed ?” To which he replied, “ I am; and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” Mark, xiv. 62.

The scripture is particular in representing the appearance of Jesus in that state of exaltation : though he has finished his labours and sufferings, yet he retains the marks of them. Hence, when John had a vision of the heavenly world, he speaks of it thus : “ And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders stood a lamb as it had been slain.” Rev. v. 6. Thus is he continually presenting the memorial of his death before the Father for his people.

Jesus not only appears before the throne with  
marks



marks of his humiliation, but the scripture also shews the posture of our Advocate. In some places he is spoken of as sitting : thus, Mark, xvi. 19. " So then, after the Lord had spoken unto " them, he was received up into heaven, and " sat on the right hand of God." The apostle Paul also speaks of the Father having " set him " at his own right hand in the heavenly places, " far above all principality, and power, and " might, and dominion, and every name that is " named, not only in this world, but also in that " which is to come." Eph. i. 20, 21. In this description we not only see a proof of our Advocate having ceased his labours and sufferings, and entered into his rest, but also of his dignity and equality with the Father.

At other times he is represented to the view of the Christian's faith as *standing*, which is a posture of readiness for action : thus the suffering martyr Stephen saw him, of whom it is said, " he, being " full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly " into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and " Jesus standing on the right hand of God." Acts, vii. 55.

But let us look now more particularly to the manner in which our Advocate discharges the duties of this office. It is not to be supposed, that he either conceals or denies any part of the church's guilt ; no, he admits the truth of all the charges



charges which have been preferred against the saved sinner, both by the law and justice of God, and also by his own conscience: he offers no plea or apology for sin; nor does he at all labour to diminish or extenuate their guilt, either in its quantity or aggravations: but he presents them before his Father, clothed in his all-perfect righteousness, and washed in his precious blood; and pledges himself for their knowing, believing, and doing his will. What he said of them in his last prayer, he may be considered as repeating now in his intercessory work above: "O righteous Father! the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." John, xvii. 25, 26.

He not only presents them as interested in himself and in all the blessings of his mediatorial work, but he presents all their religious services, especially their prayers, before the Father. The Messenger of the Covenant is surely designed in the following passage: "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne; and the smoke of the incense, which

“ which came with the prayers of the saints,  
 “ ascended up before God out of the angel’s  
 “ hand.” Rev. viii. 3, 4.

Finally : As our Advocate he becomes our intercessor. Not that he begs or entreats of the Father as if he were unwilling to give, but in a free and confident manner he claims for them, as their right, that acceptance of their persons, and the reception of all those spiritual blessings to which they are entitled, in virtue of what he has done and suffered for them as their head and representative. The nature and extent of the blessings which, as their Advocate, he claims for them, may be concluded from what he taught his disciples to pray for in what is commonly called the Lord’s Prayer; and from what he asked the Father to bestow upon his church in the seventeenth of John. They include principally two branches, grace and glory.

Under the former is comprehended preserving and supporting mercy in affliction, temptation, and death. Great as the Christian’s conflict is in these trying seasons, he cannot faint in it whilst the hands of his Advocate are lifted up for him before the throne. If he pray for him as he did for Peter, that his faith fail not, he shall be more than a conqueror. It also comprehends perseverance in grace, together with a spiritual growth in the knowledge of the truth, a continued experience of the consolations of

of the gospel, increasing in holiness, abounding in all the fruits of righteousness, and at last an abundant entrance into the heavenly glory.

These reflections are fully justified by the words of our Lord in the prayer to which we have so often alluded, and which expresses the substance of his intercession before the throne in his state of exaltation: “ And now I am no  
 “ more in the world, but these are in the world,  
 “ and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through  
 “ thine own name those whom thou hast given  
 “ me, that they may be one as we are. I  
 “ pray not that thou shouldest take them out of  
 “ the world, but that thou shouldest keep them  
 “ from the evil: they are not of the world, even  
 “ as I am not of the world. Sanctify them  
 “ through thy truth; thy word is truth. And  
 “ for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also  
 “ might be sanctified through the truth; that  
 “ they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in  
 “ me, and I in thee; that they also may be one  
 “ in us, that the world may believe that thou  
 “ hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest  
 “ me I have given them, that they may be one,  
 “ even as we are one; I in them, and thou in  
 “ me, that they may be made perfect in one,  
 “ and that the world may know that thou hast  
 “ sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast  
 “ loved me. Father, I will that they also  
 “ whom thou hast given me be with me where I  
 “ am,



“ am, that they may behold my glory which thou  
 “ hast given me.” John, xvii. 11. 15—24.

The disciples, when their Master was gone from them, must have derived much pleasure and encouragement in their spiritual warfare from the remembrance of this suitable and fervent prayer for them. We have an equal ground of encouragement for ourselves in recollecting that we have an Advocate with the Father, especially that we have such an one as Jesus, in whom every thing is united that can render him a suitable and successful Advocate for his church. He is possessed of an infinite understanding; yea, the scriptures speak of him thus: “ In whom are  
 “ hid all the treasures of wisdom and know-  
 “ ledge,” Col. ii. 3.: consequently, no state into which his saints, individually or collectively, can be brought, however embarrassing or afflicting, can exceed the compass of his ability to manage. He is omniscient, and is therefore acquainted with the minutiae of his people’s concerns, and discovers all the secret machinations of their enemies as soon as they are conceived in the mind.

They may also rest assured of their Advocate’s diligence and watchfulness in all that respects either their spiritual or eternal interest: his eyes never slumber nor sleep. The vision which the apostle John had, in the isle of Patmos, of the seven churches of Asia, and the Son of Man walking up and down among, and carefully in-



specting their doctrine, discipline, and conduct, is a proof of his care and attention to the prosperity of Zion.

And though we name it last, it is not among the least of the excellencies of this branch of our Redeemer's work, that it is constant and perpetual; it has no interval or cessation. As the incense under the law was to be "a perpetual incense before the Lord," Exod. xxx. 8.; and as the fire upon the altar was never to go out, Lev. vi. 13.; in like manner, the intercession of Christ is abiding and continual: "He ever liveth to make intercession." Heb. vii. 25.

That we have such an Advocate with the Father is,

IV. An important and valuable privilege. This will evidently appear, if we consider that it is to his appearance in heaven for us, that we owe the free and abundant communication of those "spiritual blessings" with which we are said to be "blessed in heavenly places in Christ," Eph. i. 3. and which are incessantly coming down upon the Christian church. This is the sense of the prophetic declaration made in Psa. lxviii. 18. "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them."

The advocacy of Jesus is connected with all the means of grace; and from thence we derive

much of our encouragement to use them. The apostle Paul delivers his opinion upon this subject thus : “ He that descended is the same also that  
 “ ascended up far above all heavens, that he  
 “ might fill all things ; and he gave some apostles,  
 “ and some prophets, and some evangelists, and  
 “ some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting  
 “ of the saints for the work of the ministry, for  
 “ the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all  
 “ come in the unity of the faith, and of the  
 “ knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect  
 “ man, unto the measure of the stature of the ful-  
 “ ness of Christ.” Eph. iv. 10—13.

From hence also arises the certainty of all those prophecies and promises of the scriptures, which have not yet been fulfilled, ultimately receiving their accomplishment. Among these may be enumerated principally the conversion of the tribes of Israel to Jesus Christ, the fulness of the gentiles by the universal spread of the glorious gospel in every land ; it having long since been said, “ Ask of me, and I shall give thee the hea-  
 “ then for thine inheritance, and the uttermost  
 “ parts of the earth for thy possession.” Psa. ii. 8. And again : “ And he said, It is a light thing  
 “ that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up  
 “ the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved  
 “ of Israel. I will also give thee for a light to  
 “ the gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation  
 “ to the end of the earth.” Isa. xlix. 6. These

declarations are direct promises made to the Messiah; and as the Advocate of the church he will secure their certain and complete fulfilment.

This branch of the work of Jesus Christ is also the source from whence sprang that rich and abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit under the Christian dispensation; and which, in the first or apostolic age, gave such a rapid and extensive spread to the preaching of the gospel of Christ, causing it to triumph over the deep-rooted prejudices both of Jews and Pagans, and which still continues (though its extraordinary influences have ceased) to make that same gospel the power of God to the salvation of many souls. And where this blessed Spirit enlightens the understanding, and savingly calls the sinner out of darkness into God's marvellous light, it is from the intercession of Jesus Christ that the soul receives a daily supply of its wants, establishment in grace, ability to follow on to know the Lord, and to go from strength to strength, till faith is crowned with sight, and hope with everlasting enjoyment. To this statement the words of the apostle in the following passage seem to bear some relation: "Much more then being now  
 " justified by his blood, we shall be saved from  
 " wrath through him; for if when we were  
 " enemies we were reconciled to God by the  
 " death of his Son, much more being reconciled  
 " we shall be saved by his life." Rom. v. 9, 10.

By



By the word *life*, mentioned in this scripture, we are not to understand any allusion to Christ's work and suffering upon earth in the days of his humiliation; but it is a reference to his exalted state. This sentiment is both illustrated and confirmed by that truly interesting description which the Advocate of the church gives to his aged disciple John in the following words: "I am  
 " he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am  
 " alive for evermore, *Amen*, and have the keys of  
 " hell and of death." Rev. i. 18.

But one of the most valuable of all the blessings connected with the doctrine of our text (that Christ is our Advocate with the Father), and which is now to be particularly urged, is our having access to God at a throne of grace: it is by his having gone into heaven as our forerunner, and being seated at the Father's right hand with our names on his breastplate, that we have liberty and freedom of access to God as a God hearing and answering prayer. This truth is beautifully illustrated in the following scripture:  
 " Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter  
 " into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new  
 " and living way which he hath consecrated for  
 " us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;  
 " and having an High-priest over the house of  
 " God; let us draw near with a true heart, in  
 " full assurance of faith; having our hearts  
 v 4 " sprinkled



“ sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” Heb. x. 19—22.

We are not only given to understand, by the above text, that we have liberty to come near to God, because our High-priest is gone into the holy of holies for us with his own blood; but, moreover, that we may come with strong faith and confidence. Which truth is also held forth in this passage; “ In whom” (speaking of Jesus) “ we have boldness and access with confidence, “ by the faith of him.” Eph. iii. 12. Indeed, this doctrine of approaching God with strong faith is inculcated so often in the word, as not only to shew that it is of considerable importance in itself, but also that there is too great a propensity in our hearts to come under the influence of unbelief, which naturally genders a thousand doubts and fears. Let us then be more mindful of this truth when we come to God in prayer, “ we have an Advocate with the Father;” let us remember, that he will take our poor petitions from us, present them with his own hand, and obtain an answer to them.

It is the effect of his interest with the Father as our Advocate, that we have received the grace of prayer, and the Holy Spirit to help our infirmities in the exercise of it. We had remained prayerless sinners to this hour, but for that grace and mercy which is thus set forth: “ And because “ ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of  
“ his

“ his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” Gal. iv. 6. And again: “ For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” Rom. viii. 15. This is a part of that blessed effect which was to arise from, and indeed serves to shew the expediency of the Saviour’s departure from his disciples, that the Comforter might come and abide with them, and with his church throughout all its journies in the wilderness.

When the Holy Spirit gives us a just view of our Advocate as he is engaged for us before the throne, and makes us feel the power of his intercession upon our souls, we feel the invigorating effect of it in our approach to God; we are greatly helped in prayer: neither the artful insinuations, nor the more open resistance of the great enemy, can keep us from it; nor can all the ignorance, weakness, and sinfulness, we see in ourselves, discourage us in it.

This reminds me, that it is because Jesus is our Advocate that we have persevered in prayer until now: we have too often cherished the dishonourable and discouraging thought that our prayers were neither heard nor accepted; we have often fancied that the language addressed to us by the dispensations of God was this: “ When ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you; when ye make many prayers I will  
“ not

"not hear." Isa. i. 15. Under this painful apprehension we have concluded we might as well give over praying. Thus Amalek has seemed to prevail; but the intercession of our Moses has kept us from utterly sinking: we have found that scripture verified in us, "faint yet pursuing," Judges, viii. 4.: yea, we once more with gratitude and praise exclaim, "Ebenezer! Hitherto the Lord hath helped us." 1 Sam. vii. 12.

Finally: Christ's being our Advocate is an important and blessed privilege, inasmuch as it must ultimately be successful to the accomplishment of all his purposes of love and mercy towards the church in its complete and eternal salvation. We may justly infer the prosperous issue of his intercession from the peculiar interest he has in the Father's favour. The scriptures, in representing this truth, use the strongest and most endearing language: in one passage it is said, "The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness sake," Isa. xlii. 21.; and in another the Father speaks of him thus: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth." Isa. xlii. 1. How pleasing, how encouraging the thought, that Jesus stands in such a near relation to the Father; has manifested such a strong and incessant concern for his glory, and has so zealously devoted himself, both in labours and sufferings, to the doing of his will and pleasure, that he has obtained the most flattering



flattering expressions of his favour and regard! Hence it is impossible for him to solicit any thing for his church and people, that is conducive to their present and eternal welfare, and is not incompatible with the divine glory, but it will surely be granted.

Another principle on which we are warranted to expect the most successful issue to the work of Christ as an advocate, is the large and well-established promise which the Father hath made to him. In one scripture it is thus expressed:  
 “ And he said, It is a light thing that thou  
 “ shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes  
 “ of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel:  
 “ I will also give thee for a light to the gentiles,  
 “ that thou mayest be my salvation unto the  
 “ ends of the earth. Thus saith the Lord, the  
 “ Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to  
 “ him whom man despiseth, to him whom the  
 “ nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers: Kings  
 “ shall see and arise, princes also shall worship,  
 “ because of the Lord that is faithful, and the  
 “ Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.  
 “ Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time  
 “ have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation  
 “ have I helped thee; and I will preserve thee,  
 “ and give thee for a covenant of the people, to  
 “ establish the earth, to cause to inherit the  
 “ desolate heritages, that thou mayest say to the  
 “ prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in dark-  
 “ ness,



" nefs, Shew yourselves ; they fhall feed in the  
 " ways, and their pastures fhall be in all high  
 " places ; they fhall not hunger nor thirst, nei-  
 " ther fhall the heat nor fun smite them ; for he  
 " that hath mercy on them fhall lead them, even  
 " by the fprings of water fhall he guide them."  
 Ifa. xlix. 6—10.

We may alfo assure ourfelves of the acceptance  
 of Chrift's interceffion for the church, upon  
 the ground of his having ftipulated for all fpi-  
 ritual bleffings in the covenant of grace, which  
 he has fealed and ratified by his death. It is in  
 allufion to this that Jefus is ftyled " the Mediator  
 " of the new covenant," Heb. xii. 24. and that  
 his blood is denominated " the blood of the ever-  
 " lafting covenant," Heb. xiii. 20. The con-  
 nexion which fubfifts between the death of Chrift  
 and his advocacy before the throne of the  
 Father, and the united influence of thefe to pro-  
 cure for the church all fpiritual and heavenly  
 bleffings, is beautifully and explicitly fet forth in  
 the following fcripture: " Yet it pleased the  
 " Lord to bruife him ; he hath put him to grief.  
 " When thou fhalt make his foul an offering  
 " for fin, he fhall fee his feed, he fhall prolong  
 " his days, and the pleasure of the Lord fhall  
 " prosper in his hand. He fhall fee of the travail  
 " of his foul, and fhall be fatisfied : by his know-  
 " ledge fhall my righteous fervant juftify many,  
 " for he fhall bear their iniquities. Therefore  
 " will

“ will I divide him a portion with the great, and  
 “ he shall divide the spoil with the strong, be-  
 “ cause he hath poured out his soul unto death ;  
 “ and he was numbered with the transgressors ;  
 “ and he bare the sin of many, and made in-  
 “ tercession for the transgressors.” Isa. liii. 10,

11, 12. It should seem from this interesting part of divine revelation, that all the advantages which Christians expect to arise from Christ's being their advocate with the Father are infallibly sure, inasmuch as he laid down his life on the express condition that his people should receive them ; and if his condition were not fulfilled, the covenant would be broken, and Jesus Christ himself would be dishonoured and dissatisfied, because one grand end of his mediatorial work would be unaccomplished. But this is impossible. Let us therefore come daily to the throne of grace with assurance of receiving what we ask through his all-prevalent name and intercession.

Another source of confidence, that our Advocate will prevail for us is, that he intercedes for nothing in our behalf but what the Father himself wills us by his own love and favour. On this subject the sinner's Friend has made the following declaration : “ At that day ye shall ask in my  
 “ name, and I say unto you that I will pray  
 “ the Father for you ; for the Father himself loveth  
 “ you, because ye have loved me, and have be-  
 “ lieved

“ lieved that I came out from God.” John, xvi. 26, 27. What strong ground is this for faith, since our heavenly Father is as willing to give as we can be to ask for ourselves, or as our Advocate can be to ask for us !

Lastly : We ought to be thoroughly satisfied that our Advocate will obtain for us every needful good, from the recollection of what he himself said of his Father’s attention to his prayer at the grave of Lazarus : “ And Jesus lifted up his eyes “ and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast “ heard me ; and I knew that thou hearest me “ always.” John, xi. 41, 42. This language is not only true, as it respects the occasion on which it was spoken, but it is applicable to every period of the history of the church ; it is true of every disciple whose case this Advocate carries into the court of Heaven. If it be so, then, Christian, never be backward to approach a throne of grace ; never be discouraged at the weakness and imperfection of thy prayers ; spread thy case before this Advocate ; leave it to his management ; be not unbelieving as to the issue. That we have an Advocate with the Father, is always a sufficient ground of confidence ; it is always a just ground of joy and exultation. We hasten to close this subject by addressing a few words,

1. To unbelievers and profane persons. You make no conscience of prayer, neither by yourselves



selves nor with your families, nor yet often in the  
 house of God. You consent to the doctrine of  
 the text in a general way, that Christ is an advo-  
 cate with the Father for the church; and you  
 think that it is enough if he intercedes for men:  
 you are not aware of that important distinction  
 which Christ makes in his intercession between  
 the world and the church. Hear how he expresses  
 himself upon this subject; see what a description  
 he gives of them for whom he becomes an ad-  
 vocate, and examine the point minutely and se-  
 riously: "I have manifested thy name unto the  
 "men which thou gavest me out of the world;  
 "thine they were, and thou gavest them me,  
 "and they have kept thy word, now they have  
 "known that all things, whatsoever thou hast  
 "given me, are of thee; for I have given unto  
 "them the words which thou gavest me, and  
 "they have received them, and have known  
 "surely that I came out from thee, and they  
 "have believed that thou didst send me. I pray  
 "for them, I pray not for the world, but for  
 "them which thou hast given me, for they are  
 "thine; they are not of the world, even as I  
 "am not of the world." John, xvii. 6, 7, 8, 9.  
 16, If these are the kind of persons for whom  
 Christ is an advocate; if it is for such as are given  
 to him of the Father, for such as believe with  
 the heart that Christ came out from the Father,  
 have received his words and kept them, and are  
 not



not of the world, then we say, is there any thing in the state of your soul, in the tenour of your conversation, or in the manner of your life, that can warrant you yourselves, or any body else, justly to conclude that you are of this number? So far from this being the case, the eyes of your understanding are so dark, your hearts are so earthly and sensual, and your lives so unholy, that you are manifestly quite opposite characters, and have no solid foundation for applying the comfort of this text to yourselves.

2. But you are not profane sinners: it may be, you are, and long have been, open and zealous professors of religion. Apparently, your condition is greatly superior to those of whom we have just been speaking, though, in reality, there may be no essential difference; because too many are known to answer to the apostle's description: "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." 2 Tim. iii. 5. Let us look well then to our profession: to be deceived upon this point is the most fatal of all deceptions; let us inquire what are the evidences of our having an interest in the intercessory work of Jesus Christ. He obtains and sends the Holy Spirit into the hearts of all for whom he is an advocate; and the Spirit leads them into the knowledge of the truth, convinces them of sin, and leads them to Christ for justification. He prays that they may be one with him, alluding to that spiritual and divine union,

union; without which we can neither do any thing acceptable to God, nor bring forth the fruits of righteousness. He prays that they may be sanctified through the truth, and that they may be preserved from the love and influence of the world. If he has been an advocate for us, he has procured all these blessings for us; but if we are unacquainted with them, we have reason to suspect the goodness of our state.

3. This subject affords a word of exhortation to the backslider. Thou hast, like the church of Ephesus, *left thy first love*, Rev. ii. 4. and fallen altogether under the power of a Laodicean spirit. Thy heart is not only, like that of Ephraim, divided and gone back, but thou hast openly sinned against and forsaken God; and now it is probable that the backslidings of thy heart reprove thee, and thou art in the state of Ephraim, who is thus spoken of: "I have surely heard Ephraim be-  
 " moaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me,  
 " and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed  
 " to the yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be  
 " turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely  
 " after that I was turned I repented; and after  
 " that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh;  
 " I was ashamed, yea even confounded, because  
 " I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is  
 " Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child?  
 " For since I spake against him I do earnestly  
 " remember him still; therefore my bowels are  
 " troubled

"troubled for him; I will surely have mercy  
 "upon him, saith the Lord." Jer. xxxi. 18—20.  
 If this be thy afflicted and disconsolate state, take  
 encouragement to return; thou art told in the  
 words of the text, "If any man sin, we have an  
 "Advocate with the Father." He who is here  
 spoken of is the same who looked with so much  
 pity and love upon backsliding Peter; and he  
 continues the same kind and merciful friend to  
 backsliders.

Finally: This subject is full of comfort to real  
 believers; who should neither forget nor under-  
 value this glorious doctrine. It is intimately con-  
 nected with every part of the subject of these  
 Discourses. In all our addresses to a throne of  
 grace let us then keep it in view; let us take our  
 chief encouragement in prayer from the perpetual  
 and powerful intercession of our glorious Advo-  
 cate, to whom be endless adoration and praise.

*Amen.*

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THE END.